

TOP STORY: HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS

February 20 - March 5, 1995

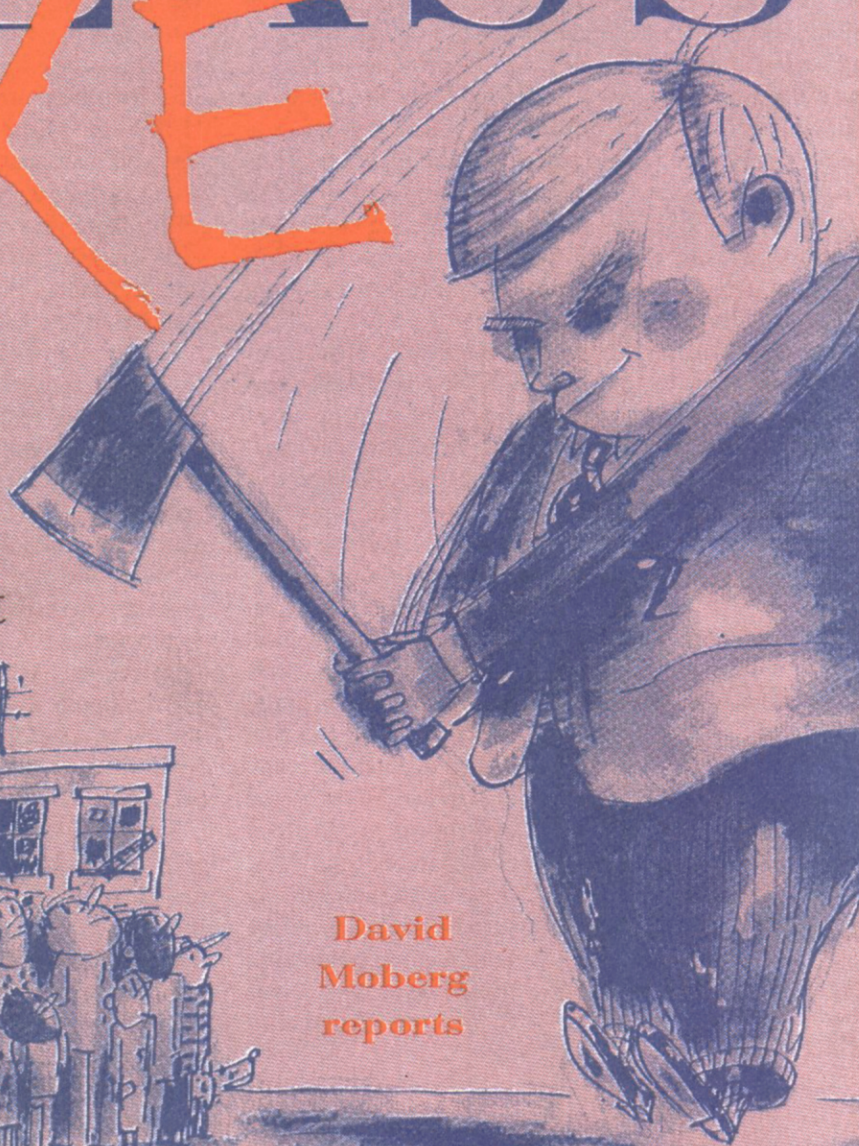
In THESE TIMES

the alternative newsmagazine

CLASS

AXE

The
GOP's
cuts are
unkindest
to you
know
who.



David
Moberg
reports

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EDITORIAL

FLAWED EXHIBIT HANDS RIGHT A VICTORY

The uproar over the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum Enola Gay exhibit, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, is a classic example of the right's ability to take advantage of liberal evasions by trumpeting a false patriotism. Given the opportunity to discuss things rationally, few people would celebrate the dropping of a nuclear bomb on the unsuspecting civilian population of a city having no strategic value. But the planners of the Smithsonian exhibit fudged the discussion, and the guardians of our Cold War culture succeeded in converting their omissions into seeming disrespect for the sacrifices made by the men and women who fought for their country in the Pacific in World War II.

Of course, it was not the intent of the exhibit planners to belittle the veterans of that war. But, like nearly everyone who has examined the events leading to the dropping of the bomb, the planners were horrified by the suffering it caused—and they felt compelled to condemn this brutal act. In doing so, however, they opted for a psycho-

*Their heart
was in the
right place,
but by evading
historical truth
the Enola Gay
exhibit planners
gave right-wing
critics an easy
target.*

logical explanation rather than a more contentious but honest one. "For most Americans," the planners wrote, "this war was fundamentally different than the one waged against Germany and Italy—it was a war of vengeance." And in the planned exhibits, they emphasized the suffering caused by the bomb while neglecting the heavy toll the war took on American troops.

The planned script and accompanying photographs gave "the impression that President

Truman, in making the decision to drop the bomb, did it to impress the Soviet Union rather than to save American lives," writes Richard P. Hallion, the Air Force historian and one of the military critics of the exhibit. Furthermore, he writes, the script "conveys the idea that Truman was motivated by racism in dropping the bomb" on Japan.

The script itself argues that casualties in an invasion of Japan, which was the alleged alternative to using the bomb, would have been much less than the 500,000 estimate given just after the war to justify the bomb's use. The script says that casualties would probably have been less than 50,000, and

the dead perhaps 10,000.

This line of argument was seen by some veterans as disrespect for their efforts and a lack of concern for their suffering. And it played right into the hands of right-wing politicians and pundits, who attacked the exhibit as another attempt by the "academic left" to undermine our nation. Such exhibits, frothed Charles Krauthammer in *Time*, "reflect the extent to which the forces of political correctness and historical revisionism, having captured the universities, have now moved out to dominate the museums and other institutions of national culture." Instead of promoting such left-wing propaganda, he wrote, the museum should simply "display the restored Enola Gay in reverent silence, with only a few lines explaining what it did and when."

For the know-nothings of the right that would indeed have been appropriate. It would have provided a gleaming symbol of our might, and left intact the myth that Truman dropped the bomb to end the war and save American lives. To their credit, the planners of the exhibit had an impulse to "portray history in the proper context of the times," as a recent Senate resolution directed them to do, and so could not leave the myth unchallenged. Unfortunately, their challenge was tentative, incomplete and heavier on moralisms than politics.

In fact, as Gar Alperovitz explains in his article on page 18, the bomb was not needed to end the war. Japan had already sent out feelers to arrange a surrender. Further, the Soviets' scheduled entry into the war on August 8, 1945, two days after the bomb was dropped, was understood by U.S. military leaders to be the final blow needed to bring the enemy to its knees. In short, the bomb was dropped not as the last act of World War II, but as the first act of the Cold War. Americans, and especially the veterans, were lied to by their government in 1945. The bomb did not save American lives, but needlessly took Japanese lives.

Sadly, the exhibit planners pulled their punches. It's easy to understand why they did so. The storm over the exhibit would have been even greater than it has been if they had told the real story. But by going only half way, they left themselves in an indefensible position, worse off than if they had accepted Krauthammer's advice. ◀

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(ISSN 0160-5992)

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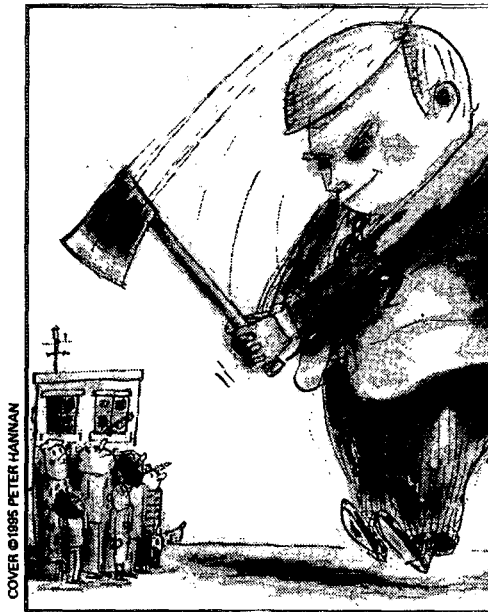
This issue (Vol. 19, No. 7) published February 20, 1995 for newsstand sales February 20 - March 5, 1995



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LETTERS

Too many holocausts

Salim Muwakkil's recent columns (*ITT*, December 26, January 23) on the response of black progressives and the civil rights movement to the November 1994 electoral triumph of conservative Republicans might benefit from the following "Jewish" perspective.

I recently spent a frustrating week attempting to get some conservative and ill-informed business and professional leaders of Louisville's Jewish community to focus on the implications of the appointment of Dr. Christina Jeffrey as historian of the U.S. House of Representatives. Jeffrey had gained notoriety in 1986 for demanding "fairness" for the Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan in federally funded Holocaust studies. Unfortunately, two or three of the six individuals replied that the Nation of Islam's Louis Farrakhan is the real danger.

American Jewish voters in New York state were the critical factor in Republican victories in both the 1993 mayoral race and that for governor in

1994. That Jews increasingly might consider African-Americans rather than the traditional "Christian Right" to be the primary threat to tolerance in our country can be seen in the foolish assault by the *Commentary* crowd on the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) 1994 report, "The Religious Right: The Assault on Tolerance and Pluralism in America."

In light of his excellent critique of the "predictable outrageousness of black nationalist demagogues" at Howard University's February 1994 Unity Nation Rally—and the well-publicized assault on the "'so-called' Jewish holocaust," at that rally (*ITT*, May 16, 1994), I wonder if Muwakkil might want to reconsider his apparent enthusiasm for a march of 1 million black men on Washington led by the National African-American Leadership Summit.

One of the more sensitive Louisville Jewish leaders I have talked to (and who obtained a copy of the ADL report for me) clearly has difficulty in accepting the notion of a Polish holocaust in World War II, or of Poland hosting the 50th commemoration of the liberation of Auschwitz. He would

clearly consider me totally *meshuginah* (crazy) if he would learn that I read and like a magazine that even writes of a "'so-called' Jewish holocaust" and of a "black holocaust."

In his January 23 story, "Circling the wagons," Muwakkil wisely wrote that in responding to the threat of long-term Republican political hegemony, progressives need to avoid "the increasingly tribal reactions of so many on both sides of the color line [that have] resulted in a dangerous increase in racial and cultural polarization."

Some progressive Catholics who are pro-life have started to use the expression "holocaust of babies" in defending their opposition to abortion. In light of the Republican takeover, can we progressives call a truce to the meaningless verbal war over the use of the term "holocaust"?

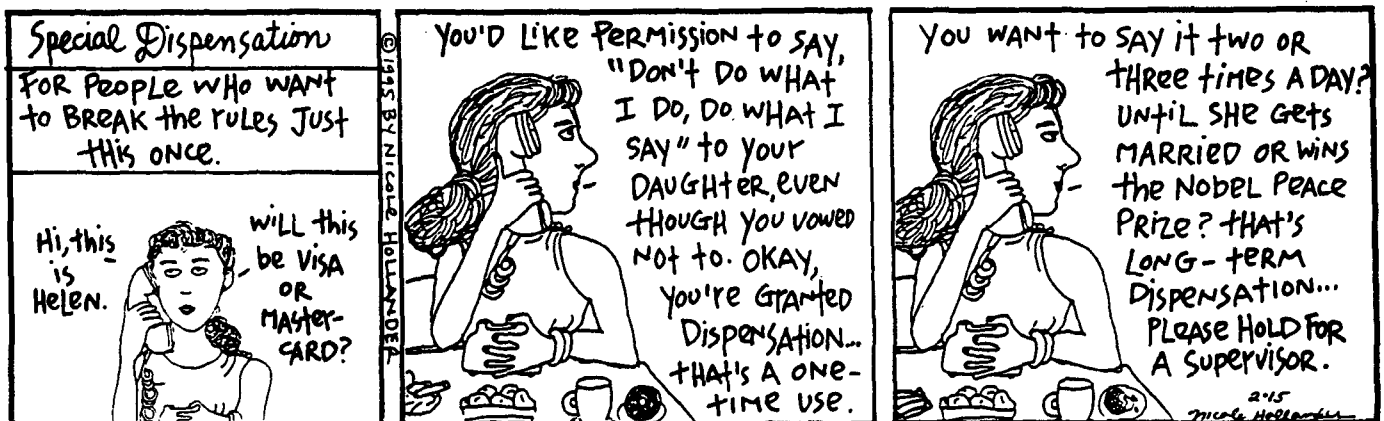
David E. Blank
Louisville, Ky.

Identifying crisis

David Moberg's article (*ITT*, December 26) on the conversion—or lack thereof—of defense industries seemed to ramble a bit and I gave up on it after a couple of pages. Then I saw this, extracted and emphasized by the editor: "Government, working with business and labor, needs to identify new social needs and develop industries to satisfy them."

SYLVIA

by Nicole Hollander



Government needs to do nothing of the sort. This is the sort of insanity that is making liberalism a nasty word and Rush Limbaugh the savior of the people. The idea of bureaucrats sitting around at taxpayers' expense dreaming up "new social needs" and then developing "industries" to satisfy them makes me, a liberal from my mother's milk, want to puke. Obviously there are endless social needs, well identified, that government has already failed to address in any satisfactory way—and you want to look for more? A social Star Wars program to protect us all against everything?

Keep up this sort of thing and liberals will join Stalinists in the dustbin of history.

Robert H. Hansteen
Philadelphia

Advocacy journalism

In These Times bills itself as a newsmagazine, but those of your writers who covered the California battle for a single-payer medical plan distinguished themselves as advocates and not as reporters. A reader would never have guessed from reading *ITT* that the plan never had a chance and was destined to be defeated by a more than 2-to-1 margin.

This particularly irritates me because, on the basis of your articles, I made a contribution to a group in Oakland. Had your writers done a more objective job, I would not have wasted my money.

Stewart H. Benedict
New York

It's the red herring

Mike Males (*ITT*, January 9) spoils an excellent essay on the U.S. welfare system by trotting out former Nixon Commerce Secretary and Concord Coalition founder Pete Peterson as the

authority on fiscal policy and income distribution. For Males, Peterson's 1993 book, *Facing Up*, proves that "exploding benefits for non-poor adults are the true cause of the nation's erupting deficit and entitlement crisis" and that as a result welfare assistance for the poor is inadequate, and shrinking.

Had Males done his own homework, he would have found that Social Security is running large surpluses (\$48 billion at present) and that without them federal deficits would be far higher.

That Social Security benefits are paid to high-income retirees is a red herring. If a Ross Perot or an Oprah Winfrey has paid in Social Security taxes year after year, he or she is as entitled to benefits as anyone. Universal coverage is essential for preserving and expanding welfare state programs—everybody contributes, everybody benefits. Many of us would extend this principle to medical care, in the form of a single-payer, tax-financed system.

If we feel that wealthy people don't need their Social Security pensions, the solution is obvious: tax their total income at a higher rate whatever its sources. Males ought to be among the first to realize that *all* non-military government programs in this country, including welfare, are chronically starved for funds. We desperately need tax increases, at the federal level and mainly on the rich, who are now separated from the rest of us by the greatest income and wealth inequalities since World War II, perhaps in U.S. history.

As a percentage of gross domestic product, taxes in the United States are lower than in any other high-income nation and they have become less progressive, beginning with the Kennedy-Johnson tax cuts of 1962-64 and culminating with the disaster of Reaganomics in the '80s. Had Males carefully read *Facing Up*, he would have noted that higher tax rates on "the most affluent" make up less than 5 percent of Peterson's proposed \$889 billion tax expenditure turnaround

aimed at balancing the budget by 2004—itself a dangerous, crackpot goal.

Males should lay off Social Security, without which at least half of our elderly would be living in poverty. It's not greedy geezers who are grinding the faces of the poor. It's the Republican-conservative Democrat coalition that has blocked adequate support for virtually all public sector activities since the effective end of the New Deal in 1938.

Richard B. Du Boff
Haverford, Pa.

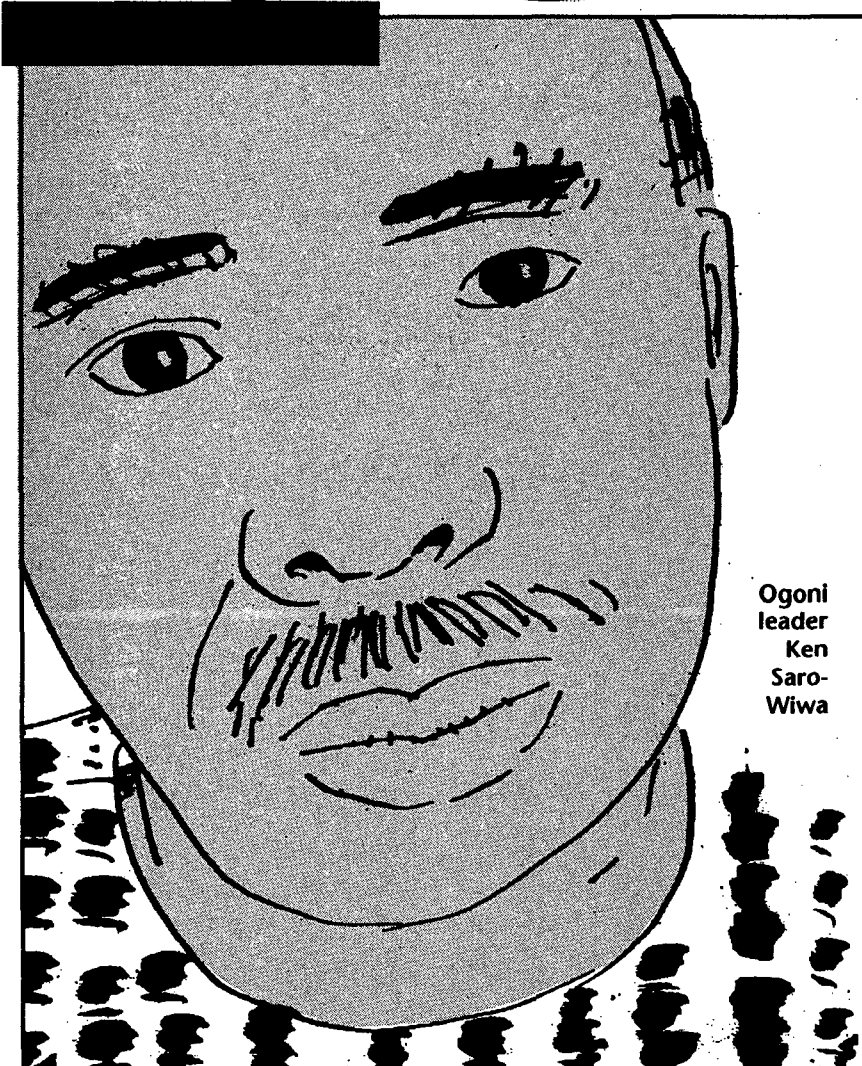
Males replies: Richard B. Du Boff defends continued payment of entitlements to the wealthy and proposes raising their taxes; Pete Peterson proposes reducing entitlements for the wealthy and raising taxes on what is left. Both advocate, in essence, transferring money from the (mostly older) wealthy to the (mostly younger) poor.

Either method is fine with me. What cannot continue is the policy of "laying off" our current Social Security system, under which the United States spends enormous sums to subsidize its elderly, yet still suffers a senior poverty rate several times higher than other industrialized nations. Increasingly, the United States is overtaxing its younger workers to support the Social Security and Medicare benefits of upper-income elders, who are receiving many times more dollars in benefits than they paid into the system. Given this fact, anyone who is serious about redistributing income in America must be willing to subject all public benefit programs—whether universal or targeted—to means-testing.

Correction

Due to an editorial mistake, the subtitle for "Draining the pool" (*ITT*, January 9) incorrectly implied that the City of Irvine has declared bankruptcy. Although Orange County has declared bankruptcy, Irvine has not.

InSHORT



Ogoni leader
Ken
Saro-
Wiwa

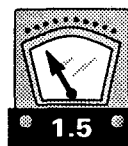
NIGERIA'S SHELL GAME

Every night millions of Americans switch on their televisions and are treated to the friendly image of Shell Oil's dancing credit cards. In Nigeria, though, even the most skilled Madison Avenue ad executives might have a difficult time sprucing up Shell's image. Shell is unquestionably the backbone of the Nigerian economy, providing 50 percent of the country's oil revenues, which in turn are 85 percent of its GNP. But Shell's continuing support for Nigeria's brutal military dictatorship has made it the target for



Homeless bound

Chicago television news anchorman Walter Jacobson was apparently less undercover than he thought during a

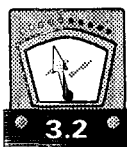


recent assignment in which he disguised himself as a homeless person. According

to the *Chicago Sun-Times*, reporters from a local radio station were able to track down the Fox TV anchorman on the streets in Chicago's Loop attempting to mingle with some authentic homeless people. As one of the radio hosts later explained, Jacobson was not hard to find. "After all, he was the only man down there wearing makeup ... a bad beard that was partially falling off ... a tiny microphone he kept adjusting ... and a TV sound truck with antennas following him."

Not on a school night

Sometime-professor Newt Gingrich is now proposing to offer cash rebates to students who finish up high school in two or three years instead of the normal four, the *Washington Post* reports. The Speaker is convinced that most students aren't using their time (or taxpayers' money) with the utmost efficiency, and are



wasting their teenage years on frivolous indulgences like a personal life. "We're subsidizing dating," Gingrich explained. "We're maintaining a fabric of education within which they can pursue their social life. This is crazy."

A speedy trial

Massachusetts inmate Mario Gomez is appealing his conviction for statutory rape now that several of the jurors in his



case have suggested they were pressured into voting for conviction by impatient jurors eager to enjoy a "nice day outside" and to get in some last-minute Christmas shopping. "I'm upset that the guy's in jail," Chad Songer, one of the repentant jurors, told the Associated Press. "At the same time, he might have done it."

All the news

From a newspaper ad promoting ABC's newsmagazine show *Prime Time Live*: "Undercover investigations that really push your buttons. Dramatic stories that tug at your heart-



strings. It's a roller coaster ride for your emotions. Right after Roseanne and Ellen." Next: *Is it splitsville for good for Robin and Jim? Tune in tomorrow to the MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour.*

APPALL-O-METER SCALE

1. Models Inc.-redible!
2. Infomercial Irritating
3. Plausibly deniable
4. L.A.P.D. blue
5. Bob Dole-iclous
6. Raoul Cédras-tic
7. Ollie North nasty
8. Holiday in Rwanda
9. Zhirnovskyesque
10. Where have you gone, Joe Goebbels?

activists in Nigeria and around the world.

Fifty-three-year-old Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Nigerian author and activist, has led the charge against Shell. As leader of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Saro-Wiwa has drawn international attention to massive environmental damage and human rights abuses in the oil-producing regions of Nigeria, and particularly in his homeland of Ogoni. MOSOP's non-violent campaign—which has included demonstrations of up to 300,000 people—has been met with brute force, resulting in more than 1,800 deaths over the last three years.

For the past nine months, Saro-Wiwa has been languishing in a Nigerian jail cell—imprisoned as part of the Nigerian military's efforts to silence "especially vocal individuals." Those efforts are outlined in an internal government memo that was leaked in late January. The contents of this memo, dated May 12, 1994, and marked "restricted," suggest that human rights violations of Shell's opponents in Ogoniland have been carefully planned by the Nigerian military dictatorship. It states that "Shell operations [are] still impossible unless ruthless military operations are undertaken for smooth economic activities to commence." The document further recommends that 400 soldiers undertake "wasting operations" against Ogoni leaders who are "especially vocal individuals." Finally, the document urges government officials to place pressure on the oil companies for "prompt, regular [financial] inputs as discussed." Just 11 days after the memo was written four Ogoni leaders were murdered. On the next day, Saro-Wiwa was imprisoned in connection with the killings. Accused, but still not formally charged, of those murders, Saro-Wiwa is scheduled to be tried by a controversial special tribunal this month.

Amnesty International has declared Saro-Wiwa to be a prisoner of conscience and in a June press release argued that his arrest is "part of the continuing suppression by the Nigerian authorities of the Ogoni people's campaign against the oil companies." Melissa Crow of the Washington-based Human Rights Watch/Africa said, "We're concerned that the proceedings against Ken Saro-Wiwa may not conform with internationally guaranteed standards of due process, particularly the right to counsel and the presumption of innocence. In addition, these special tribunals have in the past imposed the death penalty, which Human Rights Watch/Africa strongly opposes."

Over the past 30 years Shell has extracted more than \$30 billion worth of oil from the Ogoni region. Today, according to the *Wall Street Journal*, "[a]lthough there are 96 oil wells, two refineries, a petrochemical complex, and a fertilizer plant in the 404-square-mile Ogoni area, the sole hospital is an unfinished concrete husk, and the government's schools, unable to pay teachers, are rarely open." Video footage and eyewitness accounts confirm that Shell's network of pipelines routinely spill oil, gas flares spew toxic emissions and unlined waste pits litter the area. Toxins have seeped into the land and waters of the region, making living off the land—the traditional Ogoni lifestyle—poisonous to pursue. Early this month, Shell acceded to international demands that it conduct an environmental study of the Niger delta. However, the scope of the study and the composition of its reviewers have yet to be determined.

Shell says it is sensitive to the political problems in Nigeria, but company spokesperson David Williams maintains that those are "clearly issues where private companies have neither the right nor the competence to become involved, and must be addressed by the people of Nigeria and their government." In response, Andrea Goodall of Greenpeace points out that "Shell's professions of innocence ignore the fact that the Nigerian government is far

from democratic, and that Shell itself is the most powerful political actor on the Nigerian stage—both historically and currently. In Nigeria, the power doesn't come from the people, it comes from Shell. If Shell wanted to make a difference, they could.”

—Steve Kretzmann

(Steve Kretzmann is an energy campaigner with Greenpeace in Washington.)

TEMPEST IN A SIX-PACK

Amid a wave of labeling reform in the United States, booze remains the only foodstuff not required to bear a nutrition label. In fact, makers of alcoholic beverages are *forbidden* to put nutritional information on their bottles. Although alcohol is already a dietary staple in the United States—one in three American adults gets at least 10 percent of daily calories from alcoholic beverages—the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) is determined that Americans think of beer as a drug, not a meal.

And they mean business. Just ask Herbert Grant, owner of the Yakima Brewing and Malting Co., a humble brewer caught up in the remorseless machinery of the ATF's war against beer-labeling. In 1993, Grant had a nutritional analysis performed on his Scottish ale and then printed the results—B vitamins and all—on an inconspicuous corner of the six-pack carrier. Customers were pleased by Grant's nutrition-conscious voluntarism, and all seemed well until an ATF agent showed up one day, a strapping fellow who “looked like he should've been out there at Waco.” Grant was allowed to sell the labeled stock, but was told to stop labeling his products. But the ATF wasn't through with him. The agent came back, started interrogating employees, and pored over the books all the way back to the firm's founding in 1982. “This is real Kafka stuff,” says Grant.

Eventually, the ATF struck at him not through his beer, but through the cider he had been bottling for nine years. The bureau suddenly discovered that the cider was taxable, despite a previous determination that it was not. It hit Grant with a \$70,000 bill for back taxes—not a small chunk of change for a company with just \$2 million in annual sales. For good measure, the ATF decreed that the cider was actually a “wine,” and could not be manufactured on the premises of a brewery, thus wiping out in a stroke one of Yakima's mainstays.

The ATF ban against listing the fat, carbohydrate, protein and, above all, vitamin content of alcohol products dates back to an administrative determination made in the '50s. The ruling held that nutrient information on an alcohol label would misleadingly present the beverage as healthful, allowing consumers to be hoodwinked by modern-day snake-oil salesmen. Ironically, scientists now believe that alcohol can help prevent heart disease. A recent study indicates that moderate drinking can increase the amount of so-called “good” cholesterol in the blood and boost levels of an enzyme that breaks up blood clots. The ATF is sailing against the winds of change that are sweeping the food-labeling world. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) came out with its new “food facts” label last year, and the Agriculture Department is revamping its meat-labeling requirements.

Nevertheless, Grant received little support from other brewers in his battle with the ATF and its strong-arm tactics. Small brewers were unwilling to risk angering the ATF. Larger brewers, he says, don't want nutrition labeling because their products would make a poor showing. According to Grant, a

MEDIA BEAT

By Pat Aufderheide

Kids 'n TV

When House Speaker Newt Gingrich invited the Mighty Morphin Power Rangers to the opening ceremonies for the 104th Congress, it was a signal. The Power Rangers—TV's hyper-violent teen heroes—represent the sort of children's programming that the Democratic Congress had excoriated during the first flush of the Clinton presidency. Then, it seemed as if the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) might strengthen the rules promoting educational programs in the Children's TV Act of 1990. But since the November election, the FCC has been backing off from that stance.

Twice now, the commission has postponed issuing stiffer regulations on children's TV, and it may stall again. (New rules could have increased the number of hours of children's educational programming, and possibly improved quality.)

FCC head Reed Hundt recently floated an alternative set of rules, which public-interest advocates and broadcasters both hated. He proposed setting a quota for educational programs, but one to be met collectively by the stations in a single media market. Under this plan, all stations but one might foist off their public-interest responsibility onto a single station. The broadcasters hate the idea because they say it establishes quotas, while public-interest advocates say Hundt's proposal would further marginalize educational television. As longtime advocate for children's television Peggy Charren noted, such a policy would

undercut the public-trustee status that every station now has. Unfortunately, in the current deregulatory atmosphere at the FCC, the public-trustee concept is looking positively quaint.

Calling all liberals

Jim Hightower, a lonely populist voice among radio talk-show hosts (his call-in number at ABC Radio is 1-800-AGITATE), has been adding stations steadily to his list, and can now be heard in New York City. But his perspective is far from representative. According to the trade publication *Talkers*, 70 percent of radio talk shows these days have a conservative bias.

Cable cornucopia

The multiplication of television channels continues to bring a multiplication of advertisements. The infomercial business grew 10 percent last year, boosting annual revenues for infomercial producers to \$1 billion. Cable TV has been getting the majority of the business.

For those who still pine for substance, Robert Redford has announced a Sundance Film Channel for non-studio features like *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Bye Bye Brazil* and even experimental films like those of Maya Deren. Although Redford's channel is partly backed by big-time movie network Showtime, many viewers will probably have to wait a while to get it. It would show on channel spaces that cable operators may open up as a result of the FCC's relaxing of regulation.

chemical reaction between malt and yeast can yield a high concentration of B vitamins, the hallmark of a carefully brewed beer. But the big outfits skimp on the malt, a corner-cutting that results in an anemic brew with a paltry harvest of vitamins. "You can't get the full effect without having both [yeast and malt]," says Grant.

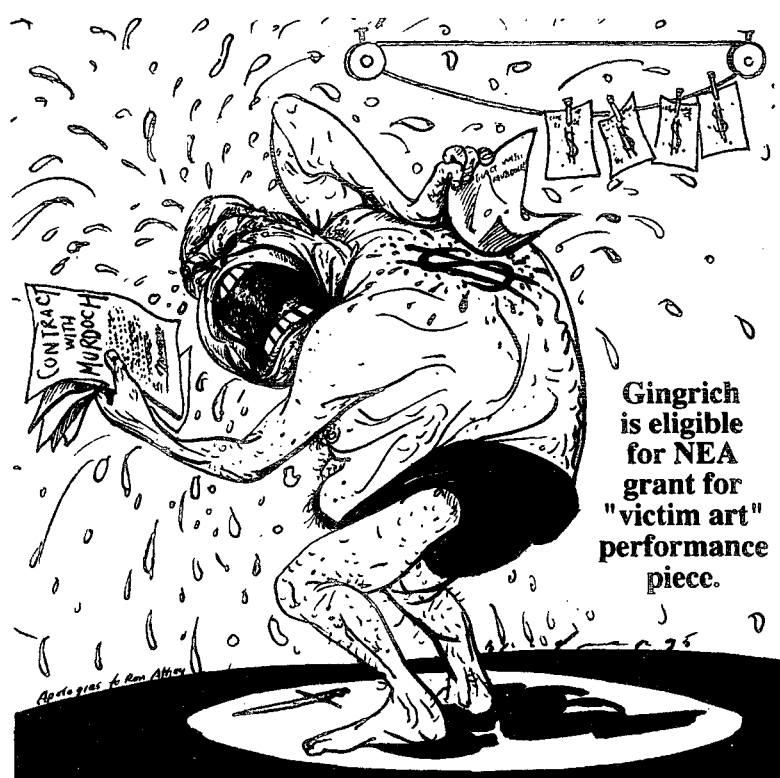
Relief may be on the way for Grant and other muzzled beer makers. A petition to require nutrition labeling of alcohol products has been submitted to the ATF by attorney C. Thomas Swaim on behalf of an unnamed client. According to Swaim, the proposal seeks "harmonization with the rest of the food supply" by mandating a simplified label for alcoholic beverages that has already been approved by the FDA for certain not-very-nutritious foods. But Swaim complains that the ATF is dragging its feet on the proposal. He also accuses the ATF of misrepresentation when it presented Swaim's petition for public comment in 1993, because the bureau failed to specify that he was calling for the simpler, less costly label to be used. Swaim is threatening to sue the bureau.

Our culture has always valued a certain lack of truthfulness about drinking. While no one should be pitching a tin can of swill as a vitamin supplement, Americans are demanding more and more information about what they put in their bodies. But this tempest in a six-pack may well presage a sea-change in American cultural consciousness. Will the beer commercial, that last fortress of the American id, finally succumb to the discourse of therapeutics? Will the scantily clad youths trade in their beach-wear for lab coats, and adopt the soothing rhetoric of bar graphs and minimum daily requirements? For the time being, no one can say for sure; but in this struggle for the souls of the nation's couch potatoes, the stakes couldn't be higher.

—David U. Andrews

Tomorrow's News Tonight

By Steve Brodner



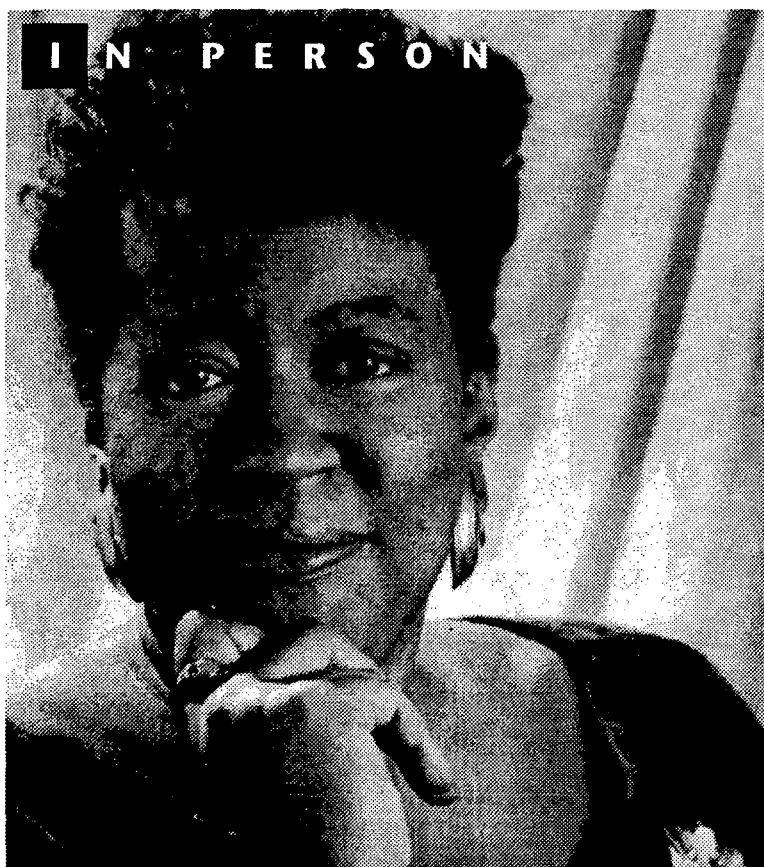


PHOTO COURTESY OF MS. MAGAZINE

MAKEOVER

*Marcia Ann Gillespie
brings a new look
to Ms. magazine*

her two children. In Gillespie's year and a half as editor of *Ms.*, her personal editorials have provided some of the best moments in every issue, giving the magazine an unmistakable moral center and transmitting a feminist concern for the world.

Gillespie is at a turning point in her editorship. Until now, she has tinkered around the edges of the *Ms.* she inherited, holding back drastic changes in look or language. The caution was necessary—the 200,000 readers of *Ms.* are intensely loyal to the magazine and pay \$6 per bimonthly issue in order to keep it afloat without ads. Yet Gillespie has been bursting with ideas about how to “open it up” and make *Ms.* more accessible to a broader range of feminists.

“I didn't want to rock the boat too quickly,” says Gillespie. But now, after editing 10 issues, she says, “it's time to make that move.” The changes won't be a surprise to those who know her. She said when she took the job that she wanted to make *Ms.* less like an academic journal and more like a magazine. This means developing a more dynamic layout and drawing more on personal essays to communicate the range of feminist opinions for which *Ms.* is known. But along with making it more “magazine-y,” she describes her vision of the

When I met Marcia Ann Gillespie, she was putting the finishing touches on a passionate editorial opposing the death penalty that could await Susan Smith, the South Carolina mother accused of killing

ETC.

By Jim McNeill

Speak no evil

Forget about House Speaker Newt Gingrich's financial dealings with publishing magnate Rupert Murdoch. The *Corporate Crime Reporter* has learned that the Georgia Republican has some even shadier friends.

The Washington-based legal weekly recently reported that some of Gingrich's key political supporters own a Carrollton, Ga., company that was convicted of federal environmental crimes in 1992. The firm, Southwire Co., along with a South Carolina subsidiary, pled guilty to knowingly failing “to report the distribution of hazardous waste” from its filtration systems. That hazardous waste was mixed with fertilizer and then illegally shipped to Bangladesh. Southwire and its subsidiary were fined \$1 million for the incident, and were ordered to buy full-page ads in major South Carolina newspapers apologizing for their crimes.

Over the last 10 years, individuals affiliated with Southwire have contributed more than \$18,000 to Gingrich's campaigns for Congress. And company president James Richards has donated \$80,200 to GOPAC, the secretive political action committee founded by Gingrich.

According to the *Corporate Crime Reporter*, the Richards family dominates political life in Carroll County, where Gingrich began his congressional career, and they've played a major role in his political ascent.

“It is common knowledge that [Southwire CEO] Roy

Richards was supporting Gingrich for Congress when he first began to run in 1974," said Doc Davis, a local attorney who ran against Gingrich for Congress in 1980.

"Roy Richards held influence at the hospital authority, at the bank—he had control of just about everything," Davis said. "Carrollton is a company town and Southwire is the company."

Dead letter office

In his 1996 budget, President Clinton promises to further streamline the federal government by privatizing inefficient agencies. Let's hope the administration isn't planning to follow the lead of the quasi-private U.S. Postal Service (USPS), whose latest privatization schemes have largely failed to increase postal efficiency—though they have succeeded in eliminating thousands of unionized positions.

An article in the January-February issue of *Dollars and Sense* magazine details how the post office has turned over some of its most lucrative operations to private contractors, who are making money by replacing unionized employees with minimum-wage workers.

Many of the most lucrative contracts have gone to defense firms like Lockheed and DynCorp., who have wisely hired former postal officials to help them obtain contracts. But what's good for those businesses may not be good for the average postal customer.

"As its most profitable parts are privatized," warns *Dollars and Sense* author Sarah Ryan, "the USPS will be forced to raise residential rates."

new *Ms.* as "less intellectual," and there may lie controversy.

"I think the magazine has to be more hands-on, more 'how this relates to your life, sister!'" says Gillespie. "I hope in some ways, that someone who never identified as a feminist before will walk by a newsstand and say, 'Hey, let me see what this means,'" she says.

"Less intellectual" does not mean less analysis, however. In an age of reaction, Gillespie believes feminists must both criticize the right and promote alternatives on issues such as welfare reform. In the pages of *Ms.*, Gillespie has gone on the offensive to present a feminist vision of values. Her view of feminist concerns is an expansive one that draws community violence, homophobia and racism into the agenda. *Ms.* will also play a more active part in national politics, issuing "action alerts" and "action agendas," coupled with lists of organizations through which people can have their voices heard.

If anyone can remake *Ms.* and give it a lighter touch while retaining its feminist politics, it's Gillespie, her friends say. "She's a woman of enormous passion and commitment," says writer Letty Cottin Pogrebin, who belongs to a black-Jewish discussion group with Gillespie. "It's a wonderful thing that Marcia is at the helm."

Gillespie says her whole life—she is now 50—has been in preparation for this moment. Her first twinge of feminist consciousness came at the age of 12, sitting next to her grandmother in a Baptist church, listening to the preacher berate a pregnant parishioner for not being married. He never mentioned the father, and demanded that the girl ask the church's forgiveness. "I remember mumbling to my grandmother, 'This isn't fair!'" says Gillespie. "It wasn't Christian, and there was no charity in what was being done to her."

Gillespie learned self-sufficiency and independence of mind from her parents in suburban Rockville Centre, Long Island, on the poor side of town where the service workers lived. "I grew up in a family where women worked outside the home," she recalls. "It was drilled into me by both my parents that it was important to be independent."

Her father had not graduated from high school, but her parents made sure both Marcia and her sister were college-bound. She graduated from Lake Forest College in Illinois with the vague idea of becoming a historian. But she fell into a job at Time-Life Books, and then in 1971—at the age of 27—became managing editor of a brand-new magazine for black women, *Essence*. In 1990, when she stepped down as editor-in-chief, Gillespie had built *Essence* from a magazine with a circulation of 50,000 to one with 2 million readers.

Breathing in the feminist atmosphere of the '70s, Gillespie was radicalized at *Essence*, despite her suspicions of a movement that, she once wrote, "seemed way too white and much too middle-class for its own good." After leaving *Essence* she was ready to join *Ms.* as a contributing editor. Now Gillespie is *Ms.*' first black editor-in-chief, a fact, she says, that on many levels is not relevant to the everyday work of putting out the magazine and collaborating with the staff.

"Of course, I'm African-American and it impacts and shapes my view on the world. I hope it brings a consciousness to make the magazine more diverse," says Gillespie, who adds that her predecessor, Robin Morgan, shared in this goal. Reading Gillespie's recent account of her struggle as an African-American woman to find a home in the feminist movement—a struggle that ended when she decided that *Ms.* provided "the only true welcome table"—gives one hope that the magazine can meet the challenge of these bleak days.

—Abby Scher

THE FIRST STONE

CIVIL INJUSTICE

By Joel Bleifuss

Another week, another shackle. The latest legislative manacle to issue forth from the Republican-dominated Congress is a scheme that would restructure the civil justice system so it conforms to the desires of bloodless corporations.

To that end, the GOP—in the name of freeing society from the supposedly crippling legal costs of a suit-happy citizenry—is proposing a series of “tort reforms” that would make it far more difficult for individuals who have been wronged to sue negligent companies.

I called Ralph Nader to ask what he thought of so-called tort reform. He scolded me for using the language of the enemy. “Here is a move to destroy tort law, and they refer to it on our side as ‘tort reform,’ ” chides Nader. He suggests a few alternative terms, such as “tort deform,” “the wrongdoers protection bill,” or “taking the judicial cop off the corporate beat.”

Nader defends the current civil justice system as the individual’s last refuge in a society where corporate entities virtually control both the legislative and regulatory processes. Through tort cases filed in civil courts, the hormone DES, the Dalkon Shield, silicone breast implants and various other unsafe products were all removed from the market.

“The tort system is a system of law that curbs and deters industrial violence in the environment, workplace and marketplace,” says Nader. “It compensates victims directly from wrongdoers, instead of making the taxpayer pay for the health costs or the disability costs. It is not bureaucratized. The civil jury is the essence of democracy. People who are aggrieved go to a lawyer, on a contingency fee, and if they win they change the law and improve the safety of everybody in society. You would think this would be a bastion of conservative commendation. But the Republicans’ wrongdoer-protection bill just shows that these aren’t conservatives, they are corporatists mas-

querading as conservatives.”

Of course, that isn’t the way the press views the situation. Most media outlets uncritically relay corporate PR about juries that have forced corporations to pay enormous damages for seemingly trivial injuries.

Take the example of the \$2.86 million a jury awarded last summer to an elderly woman in Albuquerque, N.M., who was badly burned by a cup of McDonald’s coffee. (A judge later reduced that to \$560,000.) Almost without exception, stories about the case lampooned the woman’s injuries and the size of the jury award. Few asked why the jury slammed McDonald’s. And thus this suit became another weapon in the corporate arsenal, another “fabricated, phony, incomplete anecdote,” as Nader puts it.

The *Wall Street Journal*’s Andrea Gerlin was one of the few reporters to delve beneath the froth, into the facts of the case, which are: Stelle Liebeck, 81, was sitting in her car adding cream and sugar to her McDonald’s coffee, when she spilled the cup on her lap. The coffee was about 185 degrees, which is 20 degrees more than McDonald’s competition. The coffee caused third-degree burns on her groin, thighs and buttocks. She spent seven days in the hospital and had to have skin grafts to repair the damage. Burns by McDonald’s coffee are relatively common. In the past 10 years the company has received about 700 complaints from customers who suffered burns—mild to third-degree—from spilled coffee.

Apparently McDonald’s thought Liebeck was a sitting duck. In court, company lawyers argued that the burn was the woman’s fault because she failed to remove her underwear immediately. Further, McDonald’s pointed out that the company should not be blamed because she was old and thus her skin was easily damaged. Then there was the McDonald’s expert, hired for \$15,000, who testified that the burns to Liebeck’s groin from McDonald’s coffee were statistically insignificant in light of the billions of cups of coffee that the burger behemoth serves up each year.

If spurious anecdotes are the weapons of choice for those who attack the civil courts, their straw men are trial lawyers—the attorneys who represent little old ladies suing corporations like McDonald’s. Corporations talk as if trial lawyers are driving them into bankruptcy. But nationwide, only about \$5 billion a year is paid out in medical malpractice and product liability claims. As Nader points out, that is less than the \$5.3 billion in after-tax profits racked up last year by one company, Ford.

Most reporters have been content to report on this attack on the civil justice system as if it were just an intramural squabble between corporate CEOs and trial lawyers. Lost in this two-sided debate is the fact that vital public protections

are at stake.

Ted Becker, a Chicago trial lawyer and former Yale sociology professor, says that the proposed changes in tort law will in effect deny ordinary people access to a court system where their claims would be considered by a jury of their peers. "Why not just do away with juries?" asks Becker. "That is the hidden agenda here. Then we can let corporations and insurance companies determine what a human life is worth, or what a person who is injured should be compensated. If corporations are really concerned about the increase in the size of jury verdicts in this country, they should put more effort into making products safe—and treating people fairly—and less effort into trying to influence the political process so that they won't have to do either of those things."

As it is, the current civil justice system is clumsy enough. Legal redress is still being denied to those who have suffered due to asbestos, dioxin-laden Agent Orange and exploding GMC trucks. The situation will only get worse under the judicial system being constructed by the GOP contractors. Let's consider a hypothetical horror story.

It is 2008 and America's new civil justice system is in place. Thirteen years ago, the deregulatory initiatives proposed in the Contract with America became law, which eased the way for approval of a genetically engineered drug known as Porculant. It makes pigs grow bigger. Bigger pigs mean more bacon. And bigger profits for Sow Chemical, the drug's maker and marketer.

Back in 1995, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA)—hacked apart and then hastily reassembled—had only enough resources to do a cursory examination of the drug's effects. Their study concluded that Porculant was safe, but only in very small doses. Under new Republican rules, a "peer-review panel" of experts—which included Sow scientists—was convened and quickly approved the regulations the FDA had drawn up. By 1996, almost every pork product contained minute quantities of Porculant.

Twelve years pass, and lo and behold, as thousands of girls enter puberty they develop a rare form of breast cancer. The medical profession is mystified. But a few family physicians in the Ozarks—the buckle of the bacon belt—notice that the daughters of many hardscrabble farm families suffer from this rare type of breast cancer. They conclude that mothers of the afflicted girls were eating pork from hogs treated with Porculant when their daughters

were in the womb.

A group of families with cancer-stricken daughters decides to sue Sow. But their legal options are extremely limited, thanks to the "reformed" civil justice system. Under the law, losers in civil suits must pay all the legal fees for both sides. And a long suit against Sow could cost millions of dollars—millions that the families don't have. Laws limiting the fees of trial lawyers have also been passed. Consequently, the families who want to sue have trouble finding a lawyer willing to risk years of work.

Success in the courts is also hampered by the fact that the new system of justice allows only "scientifically valid reasoning" to be introduced in court. Since eminent scientists on the peer-review panel have already approved the drug, the families rightly fear that the testimony from the environmental scientists supporting their case will not be heard.

Finally, the families realize they could have trouble suing Sow because they would have to offer "clear and convincing evidence" that Sow acted maliciously when it sent Porculant to market. In short, the future of a civil suit by the families is very much in doubt.

Although fictional, this scenario is not fantastical. It aptly demonstrates what the Republicans intend to accomplish with their so-called reforms: permit corporate pigs like Sow to treat the people of this country like so much swill. ◀

THE ADVENTURES OF A HUGE MOUTH

by Peter Hannan



ECONOMICS

Class axe

*The
Republicans'
Contract with
America
reflects a
strategy
designed not
to reform
government
but to
destroy it.*

By David Moberg

Nothing makes Republicans more apoplectic than the suggestion, however mildly offered, that their proposals favor the wealthy or big corporations. Such talk, they harumph, is positively un-American—it stirs resentment and, worse, class envy. *New York Times* columnist and word maven William Safire was so outraged at seeing the venerable word “class” used in political discourse that in a recent column he seemed to suggest banishing its use altogether, except for references to exemplary (i.e. “classy”) behavior.

Yet differences of class (in income, wealth and power) play a critical role in contemporary American politics—particularly in the legislative proposals of the Newt barbarians in the House and Senate. In many ways, direct and indirect,

the Contract with America is a contract written to serve the needs of corporations and the rich. It dramatically shifts yet more wealth and power to the already wealthy and powerful at the expense of the vast majority. That class bias is not just unfair; it's bad for the vitality of American society as a whole.

The most obvious examples of class legislation are the tax proposals, which range from liberalized depreciation allowances to halving the tax on capital gains. More than half of the contract's tax benefits, according to a Treasury Department study, would go to the top 10 percent of families—those with incomes over \$100,000. This government-mandated redistribution of wealth simply compounds the already existing inequities of the marketplace. During the '80s, while the incomes of the middle class stagnated and those of the poor declined, the rich grew richer, with those in the top 1 percent more than doubling their real income.

While the class politics of tax cuts are relatively clear, the balanced-budget amendment also has a class bias that, though harder to see, is no less pernicious. By establishing strict voting requirements, the amendment passed in the House makes it harder to increase taxes—or to cut tax breaks—than to cut spending.

Low- and middle-income families typically get more of their benefits through direct government spending programs, such as Medicare, Head Start or aid to schools. Public goods that broadly benefit citizens and businesses—such as medical research, transportation infrastructure, and environmental protection—most often take the form of spending programs.

The rich and corporations, by contrast, get most of their government assistance in the form of tax breaks. In this fiscal year alone, such “tax expenditures” will amount to \$400 billion in foregone revenue, far more than the deficit or the total cost of Social Security, according to an analysis by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington think tank. As Robert McIntyre of Citizens for Tax Justice explains, such “corporate welfare” includes excessive depreciation write-offs (\$164 billion over the next five years), tax breaks for mergers and acquisitions (\$9 billion), uncollected taxes on multinational corporations (\$46 billion), and subsidies for business meals and entertainment (\$29 billion).

The line-item veto approved by the House in early February continues this same pattern of inequity. It gives the president power to veto spending proposals or very narrow tax breaks, but it specifically exempted—contrary to the Republicans' own language in the Contract with America—all of the biggest, broadest tax breaks from the line-item veto.

The balanced-budget amendment, combined with other initiatives to cut spending, will shift more responsibilities to the states and more burdens to low-income taxpayers. For while the federal income tax is somewhat progressive, "virtually all state tax systems are regressive," as Philip

poor and working people will feel the squeeze.

Most states are already suffering fiscal crises—crises that can only get worse if they follow through on currently popular plans to cut taxes (except the most regressive tax, the sales tax) and slash programs even further. The pro-



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Dearborn, finance director of the federal Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, explains. Now, on average, states get 26 percent of their revenue from the federal government. As federal assistance is cut back, many programs will be slashed. And those that survive the cuts will be funded with more regressive taxes. Either way,

grams being slashed tend to be those designed to help the poor, but programs that serve the middle class (schools, police, health services, aid to the elderly) are also under the gun. In many cases, the burden will be shifted to local governments, where the disparity in wealth and social problems among suburbs and central cities will almost certainly

intensify both the insults and privileges of class.

State and local governments may know their local terrain better than Washington bureaucrats, but that doesn't mean they're closer to the people, as the Republicans argue. State legislatures are often more corrupt, incompetent and cowed by business interests than even Congress. Typically, voter turnout is lower for state or local races than for national elections, skewing results in a more conservative direction. Increasing power to the states does not increase the level of participatory democracy.

Businesses play state governments off against each other, pressuring them to give tax breaks in order to keep or attract business. By threatening to move jobs elsewhere, they blackmail state governments into passing anti-labor legislation to create what is euphemistically called a "good business climate." And while some states and cities are demanding that businesses at least deliver jobs in return for their subsidies (as labor consultant Greg LeRoy details in a recent study, *No More Candy Store*), the blackmail continues.

*The Republicans
aren't returning
government to
the people;
they're handing
it over to the
corporations
and the rich.*

For example, Exxon last year extracted more than \$14 million in tax abatements from Louisiana for routine maintenance or compliance with safety and environmental regulations at its plants, even though the investment promised only one new permanent job. In its first act, the newly Republican Illinois state House voted to repeal an 88-year-old worker-safety law "to improve the business climate in the state," a G.O.P. legislator explained.

The new restrictions on unfunded federal mandates, combined with financial pressures on the federal government, will effectively mean an end to most federal setting of standards. The mandate restriction won't provide any money to the states for past mandates. Federal revenue sharing to help finance those mandates would have been constructive federalism.

Republicans, however, aren't interested in a progressive federalism that raises standards. They want to block or roll back federal rules, whether those rules strengthen democracy through "motor voter" registration or protect public health under the Drinking Water Act. Instead of sharing revenue, the Republicans have proposed regulatory budgets that would cut back existing mandates—especially environmental laws—and block most new initiatives.

The federal government has enacted regulations—consumer safety, workplace health and safety, environmental protections, and much more—to protect the general wel-

fare, usually against the depredations of business, both large and small. Over the decades, it has done that either because the states have been unwilling or unable to act or because some states have resisted the progressive initiatives of others.

Without the potential of national uniformity or minimum standards, turning powers back to the states is likely to promote innovation only in the ongoing contest to see who can be the stingiest, meanest and most regressive. States can be "laboratories of democracy," but they need the federal government to put its power and money behind the successful ideas that emerge.

Yet successful government is hardly the Republican goal. The Contract with America reflects a strategy designed not so much to reform but to destroy government—except, of course, for the army and police apparatus—and to shift power to the private marketplace, the realm of businesses big and small.

By limiting government's size, power and effectiveness, the Republican strategy thus gives freer rein to the market forces that are pushing this country toward greater income inequality. The contract further limits the already inadequate powers of government to halt the decline of the middle class, the assaults on workers, and the marginalization of the poor that result from the workings of the free market.

One of the key anti-government initiatives currently under consideration is the badly misnamed "Job Creation and Wage Enhancement Act," which might be better named "The Government Crippling and Corporate Lobbying Enhancement Act." Besides its corporate tax breaks and ban on unfunded mandates, the act would create a complex web of restraints and obstacles that would make it extremely difficult for Congress to pass new laws protecting the environment or guarding the health and safety of workers and consumers, argues Gary Bass, executive director of OMB (Office of Management and Budget) Watch, a government oversight group.

Besides establishing strict—and diminishing—regulatory budgets for both the public and private sectors, the legislation would require the government to provide elaborate estimates of what economic impact any new rules might have on businesses. There would be peer-review panels, which could include industry hacks, and the opportunity in many cases to take agency actions before a court for review even before a proposed rule is published. The law would also greatly restrict both the information government collects (at a time when government policy is already hampered by the inadequacy of its information) and the dissemination of information. It would expand lobbyists' ability to communicate—even in secret—with government regulators.

The risk assessments at the heart of this bill are not just obstacles to regulation; they set up procedures that can easily be manipulated by corporations. It is always easy to measure (and exaggerate) the costs of regulation, but its

benefits are often more diffuse and extend far into the future, making them harder to gauge. The costs of regulation are also typically borne by business; the benefits go to the general population. Why should citizens be asked to pay with their health for the profits of a business? In the final analysis, if a fair cost-benefit analysis were applied to this proposed legislation, it would never be considered.

Equally troubling, one key section of the act perversely reinterprets the "takings" clause in the Constitution to permit property owners to sue for compensation if any agency regulation, permit decision, license or other action limits the lawful use of any land or water (or right to use that property) and reduces the value of the property by 10 percent or more. This could result in unpredictable legal claims, not only, say, from farmers with wetlands they were blocked from destroying, but also from big corporations with polluting factories or contaminated land sites.

The act thus establishes a dangerous precedent: that broad government legislation for the general welfare can be interpreted as "takings" of private property. The ideological movement behind this measure views most modern government legislation, from labor law to social welfare legislation, as a kind of theft, "taking" from property owners the profit they might have made under a laissez-faire market. The act would force government to compensate for this supposed theft. The class bias in favor of property owners over citizens in general could hardly be more clear.

So what, the Newt Barbarians say, if the government is dismantled. The rich, newly endowed with the wealth previously wrested from them by nefarious government, can provide through charity what the government has failed to though welfare. Don't count on it. For the past three decades, total private charity has remained at roughly 2 percent of the gross domestic product, regardless of tax law changes. Little of that charity helps the unfortunate: only about one-tenth of the \$126 billion in 1993 charitable contributions went to human services, and much of that went to disaster relief.

"Private contributions do not tend to flow to communities in need from affluent communities," reports Ann Kaplan, research director of the American Association of Fund-Raising Counsel. "Philanthropy isn't intended to achieve that redistribution of income. That's a role of government and the progressive tax system."

Though presenting themselves as champions of reform, accountability, efficiency, personal responsibility and other worthy goals, the Republicans are undertaking an agenda far different from their rhetoric. They aren't returning government to the people; they are dismantling it, locking in draconian cuts in government spending, increasing the regressivity of its financing, obstructing future protections of public safety and health, elevating the rights of property and the power of corporations, and guaranteeing that social inequality will increase even more.

While carrying out this duplicitous agenda, they are

winning kudos for being honest and forthright. While launching a massive pro-rich, pro-business, pro-private property offensive, they are acting shocked—shocked!—that anyone could raise the issue of class.

It is remarkable that there has been such a feeble response to this camouflaged class warfare. While it is unclear whether Clinton is willing to draw the line anywhere on the Republican agenda—except on the assault weapons ban and his volunteer service plan—there is renewed hope that the Senate may narrowly defeat the balanced budget amendment. Liberals and the left—along with much of organized labor—have been slow to act.

A few organizations and leaders, among them Ralph Nader and Teamsters President Ron Carey, have called for an end to "corporate welfare" and to environmentally harmful subsidies to corporations, such as those cutting timber or digging mines on public land. Rep. Dick Gephardt (D-MO), for example, in a speech at the Economic Policy Institute earlier this month, called for a new economic internationalism, a strategy to raise standards and guarantee rights for workers everywhere. At the same time, he argued, the United States needs a new economic nationalism, which sets as its goal protecting the living standards of "hard-working, middle-class families here at home." In proposing a new global "code of conduct for business," Gephardt argued that "the single, simple, fundamental task of our party ... is to fight for the standard of living of working families and the middle class."

However slowly and feebly, the current debate is beginning to be defined more in class terms. That is crucial for the Democrats and liberals, who need to move beyond a shopping list of programs and causes and to create a sense of solidarity and common interest among a very diverse working class majority. Americans have traditionally felt a deep ambivalence about class, and have hesitated to blame the rich for their own deprivations. And the Democrats might have a difficult time convincing the public they truly stand for working people. But stirring popular passions against inequalities of wealth and power would not only be good politics for the Democrats: it would also be good for the welfare of the nation as a whole. ◀

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HIROSHIMA

Historical cleansing

*A key point
was missing
in the debate
over the
Smithsonian's
Enola Gay
exhibit: there
was no
military
necessity to
use the bomb.*

By Gar Alperovitz

It is no accident that most of the really critical points about the Hiroshima decision were lost to all but the most careful observers as the recent Enola Gay controversy unfolded. The "debate" itself—the result of a well-oiled and well-financed campaign by the Air Force Association, the American Legion and some 81 members of Congress, culminating in the decision by the Smithsonian Institution to scale back its proposed Hiroshima exhibit to a bland presentation of the Enola Gay's fuselage—was a model of misdirection.

First, the conservative critics charged, the idea that dropping the atomic bomb launched the nuclear era was too controversial. Then, they claimed, the exhibit didn't tell enough about Japan's undisputed World War II military brutality, and it told too much about dissension among

American military leaders troubled by the idea of bombing a Japanese city without warning. In the end it came down to a dispute over the number of lives the bomb might possibly have saved—if, in fact, it had averted an American invasion of Japan.

From most press accounts of the recent Enola Gay controversy any reader would have thought that these were central issues in the historical debate over the bombing of Hiroshima. What was largely bypassed in the discussion was the simple but overwhelming truth that most serious scholars of the subject have concluded that the use of the atomic bomb was almost certainly unnecessary—that there would have been no invasion of Japan, and hence no invasion casualties.

We have been so deluged with biased reporting of these issues that this point needs to be underlined. As early as 1946 a massive official study by the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey concluded that "certainly prior to 31 December 1945, and in all probability prior to 1 November 1945, Japan would have surrendered even if the atomic bombs had not

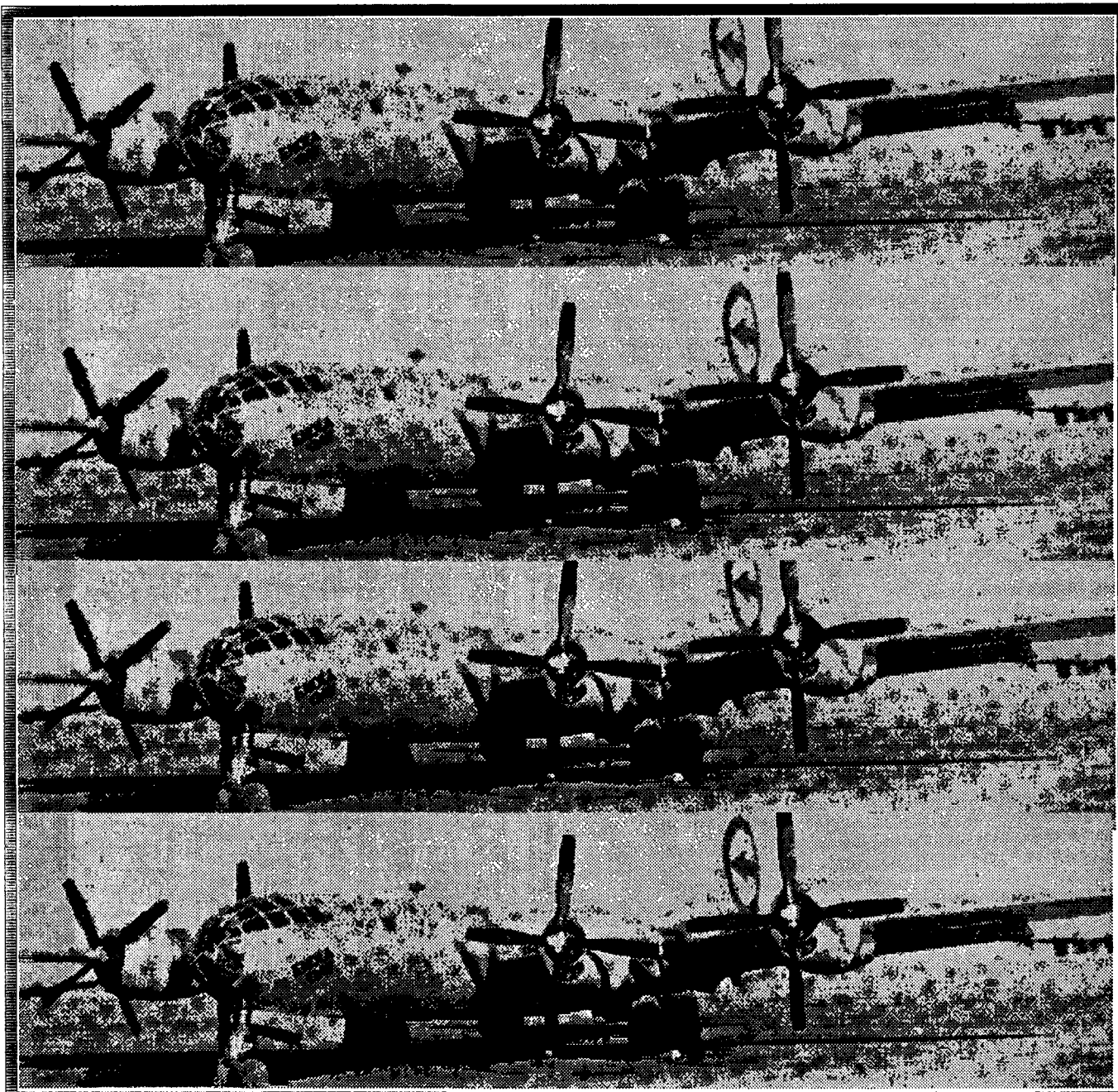
been dropped, even if Russia had not entered the war, and even if no invasion had been planned or contemplated."

Similarly, a secret 1946 War Department study reported that "the Japanese leaders had decided to surrender and were merely looking for sufficient pretext to convince the diehard Army Group that Japan had lost the war and must capitulate to the Allies." The study concluded that the entry of Russia into the war "would almost certainly have furnished this pretext, and would have been sufficient to convince all responsible leaders that surrender was unavoidable." This official study judged that well before the bombings even an initial November 1945 landing on the island of Kyushu was only a "remote" possibility and that the full 1946 invasion of Japan proper would not have occurred.

Many American military leaders felt a similar uneasiness about the use of the bomb. According to Dwight D. Eisenhower, "Japan was already defeated. ... It wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing."

And the highest military official of the United States—chief of staff to the president, Adm. William D. Leahy—later minced few words: The "Japanese were already defeated and ready to surrender. ... The use of this barbarous weapon at Hiroshima and Nagasaki was of no material assistance in our war against Japan."

The reasons the various studies and military leaders judged the bombing to be unnecessary are now clear. By the summer of 1945, the Japanese were in extremely dire straits. Long before the bombing of their cities began, the U.S. Navy had shut down a high percentage of Japan's military industry by ringing the island nation and preventing necessary supplies (particularly oil) from reaching her harbors. A



decision was made at the end of June to attempt to end the war—and Japan had sent out numerous feelers indicating that the main (probably only) real obstacle to surrender was the U.S. demand for “unconditional terms,” which threatened the person of the emperor.

The joint chiefs of staff, the secretary of war, the secretary of the Navy, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the British military leaders and—with the sole exception of James F. Byrnes—virtually everyone at the top of the U.S. government thought that there was a very good chance the war would end if Japan was told the emperor would not be harmed. The reason: he was regarded as a god—more like Jesus or the Buddha than an ordinary human being. If the emperor’s life or position was in doubt, Japan would fight

to the end; if he were allowed to reign in a purely ceremonial role, like that of the queen of England, it seemed highly likely that the war would end. Indeed, intercepted messages showed that in July 1945 the emperor himself had intervened directly to attempt to end the war.

But reassuring the emperor was only one option. Another was simply to wait for the Russians to declare war—which they were expected to do in early August. Intelligence advice beginning in April suggested that when this occurred—when the massive and at the time still neutral Red Army joined the fray—the military-political shock would be so great the fighting would likely stop. If assurances for the emperor were combined with the Russian attack, Japanese surrender was almost inevitable.

Recently discovered documents have clarified President Truman's personal understanding of the situation. The president's once-secret private journal, and his private letters, illuminate his recognition well before the atomic bomb was used that the Soviet declaration of war seemed all but certain to end the fighting. After Stalin confirmed Russia would declare war on Japan in early August, Truman privately noted: "*Fini* Japs when that comes about." And writing to his wife, the president observed that with the Soviet declaration "we'll end the war a year sooner now, and think of the kids who won't be killed!"

For the most part, the real debate about the atomic bomb among experts is not whether it was necessary; it is largely about *why* a weapon both barbaric and unnecessary was used. Here the range of opinion is far greater. Some historians, of course, continue to hold that the bomb's use was "inevitable" because of the technological, bureaucratic and/or military momentum built up during the war. Others feel that the president feared political criticism if the "unconditional surrender" language was modified. Some writers suggest that because huge sums were spent developing the new weapon political leaders found it impossible *not* to use it. Some feel racism was an important factor. Still others have probed the intricacies of decision-making through an analysis of bureaucratic dynamics. Although specialists still debate precisely how much weight to accord such factors, most agree that political-diplomatic considerations (not just military ones) were involved.

It is obvious, for instance, that although American leaders at first were desperate for a Russian declaration of war to shock Japan into surrender, once the Alamogordo test proved the enormous power of the new weapon, everything changed. Now the Americans wanted the Russians out of the picture. A week after the test, for instance, Churchill observed: "It is quite clear that the United States do not at the present time desire Russian participation in the war against Japan." The diary of Secretary of Navy James V. Forrestal records that, indeed, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes was now "most anxious to get the Japanese affair over with before the Russians got in." And another private journal—that of Byrnes' personal assistant, Walter Brown—notes that the secretary of state was "hoping for time, believing that after [the] atomic bomb Japan will surrender and Russia will not get in so much on the kill, thereby being in a position to press claims against China."

There is also strong evidence that U.S. leaders saw the bomb as a way to impress the Russians and make them more amenable to American terms not only in Asia but also in Europe. Especially important in this regard was Truman's chief adviser, his hard-line Secretary of State Byrnes. In one of their very first meetings, according to Truman, Byrnes explained that "in his belief the atomic bomb might well put us in a position to dictate our own terms at the end of the war."

Byrnes' basic attitude is not much in doubt—nor is there any question that his influence was dominant with Truman.

Evidence of exactly what happened in the final week of decision-making just before Hiroshima, however, is very spotty—largely because things were done informally between Truman and Byrnes, two old friends from Senate days: On the ship over for the Potsdam meeting, Truman and Byrnes had opposing staterooms and had long talks as they walked the ship's deck; at Potsdam they shared a villa and talked over meals and late-night drinks. It is impossible to "prove" anything definitely. Nonetheless, increasing numbers of scholars recognize the enormous significance of the diplomatic factors—and as they debate precisely how much weight to accord them, the trend (especially with the Cold War over) appears increasingly toward ever-greater recognition of their centrality in the decision.

Unfortunately, it is open discussion of all these issues that the conservative critics of the Smithsonian exhibit want to prevent—which is why a long list of historians (of all ideological stripes) have in a letter to the Smithsonian condemned the "historical cleansing" of the exhibit in such strong terms. Unfortunately, the "cleansing" is likely to continue. Some of the congressmen and senators are now promising hearings on the way the Smithsonian is run—and many have called for firing the rather timid and inept director of the Air and Space Museum, Martin Harwit.

The critics have convinced many that to talk honestly about the political record is to somehow insult the honor of the Americans who served in the war. But the debate is not about the valor of the veterans—and suggestions that this is so are simply dishonest. The servicemen in the field in 1945 had no idea what was going on at upper levels. They were told they were going in—and they were willing to risk their lives for their country. By any standard they should be regarded as heroes both by supporters and critics of the decision alike.

In the face of such well-organized political pressure—and the total lack of backbone at the Smithsonian—scholars and activists around the country, under the aegis of the Historians' Committee for Open Debate on Hiroshima, have decided to take matters into their own hands. The bombing of Hiroshima launched a nuclear arms race that still threatens the globe—as well as our own national security. On campuses around the country, "teach-ins," special commemorative services, conferences, panel discussions, symposia and other events are being organized to promote a real dialogue—and an honest debate of all views—on the meaning of the events of 1945.

The essential judgment and bottom-line lesson (as usual) is: do your homework, get your facts straight—and then, if you don't like the way things are being managed from above, speak your piece as clearly and honestly as you can. ◀

Gar Alperovitz, author of *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam*, is completing a new study (to be published by Knopf in July) on the decision to use the bomb. The Historians' Committee, chaired by Martin Sherwin and Kai Bird, can be reached at (202) 332-4919 or by e-mail at kai@apc.org.

B R I T A I N

Labor's right-face

*As the
Conservatives
self-destruct,
Labor
prepares to
take power.*

By Sasha Abramsky
LONDON

Politics is a volatile business. Just three years ago Britain's Conservatives won their fourth election in a row, and seemed destined to rule unhindered for generations. But now John Major's government has the desperate look about it that only a party 40 points behind in the opinion polls can muster. For the first time in nearly a generation, the pundits are actually writing about Labor as the party of government, and its leader, 41-year-old Tony Blair, as the shining statesman of the hour.

Across Europe and America, governments are feeling the wrath of electorates fearful of the future and insecure about the present. In Britain, the Conservative Party—long the darling of the Establishment—has been abandoned by its friends in the media, and thrown into chaos by a

series of corruption scandals and internal schisms over the role the country should play within the European Union (EU). With a leadership noted only for mediocrity and incompetence, and a tired agenda bereft of any innovative ideas, the Tories have plunged to unheard-of lows in the opinion polls. By early January they were polling 18 percent compared to over 60 percent for Labor. Were their fragile parliamentary majority to crumble in the next couple of months, Major's government could face an electoral annihilation similar to the one suffered by Canada's Conservatives in their last election.

Yet until recently Labor's Tony Blair was portrayed in the media as a lightweight, a man of little substance, perfectly suited to the nicknames "Bambi" and "Tony Blur." When running for the leadership of the Labor Party last summer, after his predecessor John Smith's sudden death, the charge was continually leveled against him that he was all image and no substance, a blue-suited politician with a plastic smile, a firm handshake and the irritating voice of a persistent but insincere missionary. Many warned that he would be unable to hold the Labor Party together or successfully challenge the government's policies.

But with Major's government in turmoil, that all seems far in the past. As Mark Lawson recently wrote in *The Independent*, if the press attaches any alias to Blair now, it is generally "the next prime minister." No matter the intense distrust that many Labor activists have for the party leadership: an aura of success surrounds the party, its parliamentarians await the mantle of government, and as the bandwagon of success has gathered momentum, membership has soared by more than 20 percent, to over 300,000. Gone are the black days following the Conservative's upset victory in the April 1992 election, when Labor activists and commentators alike foresaw a future forever dominated by Conservatism. Labor is clearly confident of winning power.

The party leadership is eerily Clintonesque. Blair—whose parents were Conservatives, and who himself only joined the Labor Party as a young lawyer in his 20s—has jettisoned the old focus on class antagonisms and their roots in economic and social exploitation. Instead, he talks of building a movement around a political center defined by its ethical beliefs.

Blair's advisers on the Social Justice Commission, a group of experts gathered by the party to outline a new vision for a fair welfare and taxation system, believe Labor must stress its credentials as the party of investment—both in the economy and in the moral and social infrastructures of society. They believe that expanding the economy as a whole is more important than moving toward material equality within the economy's present cramped confines. "The Investors believe we can combine the ethics of com-

munity with the dynamics of a market economy," says an advisory report issued by the commission. "Unlike the Levellers [as the commission calls Labor's left wing], the Investors achieve security by redistributing opportunities rather than just redistributing income."

The report recommends a mélange of Clintonism and Social Democracy. It calls for the creation of a voluntary community and environmental service corps, reminiscent of Clinton's watered-down National Service program. And it trots out Labor's answer to the American workfare initiative by suggesting that workers be allowed to transfer their welfare payments to employers who hire them—in effect, subsidizing their own employment through the welfare system. On the other hand, it advocates democratizing the shopfloor

***With Labor's
dreamers and
idealists
banished from
the party,
British politics
is a dull sport
these days.***

with works councils, modeled on the councils common throughout Germany, which would be elected by workers and give them a say in management decisions in the workplace. The report also proposes the extension of Employee Share Ownership Plans, which try to give workers a greater stake in their company's success by issuing them shares of stock. It even flirts with the idea of a Citizens Income, under which the government would guarantee a basic income to all citizens.

Investment in "human capital" is a particularly high priority for the commission, which fears that British workers are undertrained and undereducated. Fewer teenagers remain in school until the age of 18 in Britain than in most other industrialized countries, and fewer go on to college or meaningful training programs. To cure this ill, the commission has proposed establishing a "Learning Bank," into which employers, the government and individuals would put money. People would then draw from it throughout their lives to continue or expand their education and training.

For those who disagree with the direction the party is taking, it is hard to acknowledge that the policy documents Labor has been producing recently do contain some serious new thinking. True, many of the ideas bear virtually no resemblance to the socialist principles that have guided the party since its inception at the end of Queen Victoria's reign. But, unlike the intellectual vacuum that emerged after many old shibboleths were smashed in the late '80s, today's party is staking out its own ideological territory with considerably more confidence.

The process of "modernizing" the party began under Neil Kinnock, following Labour's defeat in the 1987 general

election. Many old Labor policies—unilateral nuclear disarmament, renationalization of utilities, support for trade union closed shops—were shelved. Under Smith and now Blair the move away from traditional Labor Party values has accelerated. It will be symbolically completed on April 29, when a special conference is almost certain to approve the "updating" of Clause Four, the most sacred clause in the party's constitution. Blair and his followers are expected to replace Clause Four, which pledges Labor to fight for "common ownership of the means of production," with a vague commitment to safeguard consumers' interests and work for public-private partnerships.

According to its chief economics adviser, Ed Balls, the party favors protecting consumers' rights in areas such as telecommunications through encouraging competition. Although government regulation would remain, albeit in a highly limited way, price-setting and profit-limiting would be abandoned. Gone are the days when Labor committed itself to a publicly owned telephone monopoly. Instead, the party has accepted the enormous technological changes, the opening of international markets and the financial deregulation that has occurred since it last held power in 1979. It has embraced many elements of market competition and free trade, and is developing a political view that envisions Britain working firmly within the economic framework of the EU.

Critics of this revamping have persistently claimed that "old" ideas are being replaced by no ideas, that "modernizing" is a code word for adopting the agenda of the right and attempting to win power on the basis of being more conservative than the Conservatives, and that the soul of the Labor Party has been torn out by a leadership no longer connected to its socialist heritage. According to Tony Benn, a now marginalized former Cabinet minister and a leading defender of the old left faith, Blair's "general strategy is to dismantle the Labor Party and set up a new party based on the American Democratic Party." Once in government, such a party would introduce only modest reforms, essentially carving out an image acceptable to right-wing Labor Party members, Liberals and moderate Conservatives.

Labor's newfound opportunism was on display in the recent passage of the Criminal Justice Bill. This legislation drastically curtailed the right to public protest, making all actions that interfere with the lawful activities of any other person potentially illegal. Since any picket line could be deemed to interfere with the rights of other people to walk down the street, in theory the law precludes most forms of group protest. It also criminalizes the act of trespass on open land, which had previously been a civil offense. This clause strikes a blow at environmental activists in the anti-roads campaign, who often try to physically occupy sites in the countryside to prevent them from being obliterated by highways, as well as animal-rights militants who disrupt fox-hunts. The law also targets "rave" concerts, countercultural gatherings that feature all-night dancing, occasional drug use and the voicing of anti-establishment political senti-

ments. Police are now empowered to disperse or arrest people suspected of traveling to illegal raves; the legislation even bans the playing in public of "music with a repetitive beat." Even more ominously, the act eviscerates the right of criminal suspects to remain silent; a refusal to answer questions can now be presented in court as evidence of guilt.

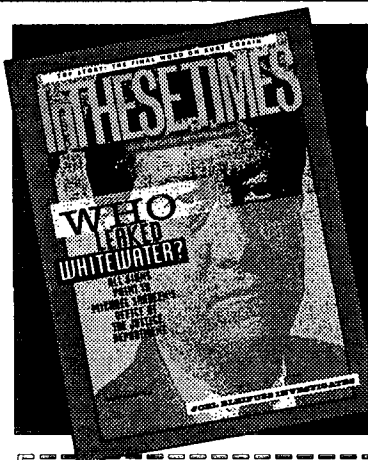
Yet despite the fact that every civil liberties and human rights group opposed the bill, the Labor Party—not wanting to appear "soft on crime"—abstained from the vote. As a result, many young people have lost faith in the party as a vehicle for progressive social change. According to Camilla Berens, a spokeswoman for the Freedom Network, which opposes the law, "There's nobody there for us in Parliament."

But despite (or perhaps because of) Labor's cautious centrism, it sits in a strong position to cut the umbilical cord between the state and the Conservative Party. Granted that a week is indeed a long time in politics, and that the Conservatives don't have to call an election until 1997, it is still more than likely that Tony Blair will be moving into Downing Street after voters cast their ballots. He will head a Labor government that is "decent" and "fair," inoffensively moderate and determinedly technocratic. He will owe his election in large part to Middle England's middle classes and will be reluctant to pander to the socialist impulses of party activists.

His government will probably fail to create full employment and certainly won't right all the wrongs of Thatcherism and its muddled, corrupt offspring. Grand visions, and the political imagination needed to see beyond the narrow horizons of a politics of the possible, are absent in parties of all hues in Britain today. The Labor Party will come in with a strong critique of existing ills, and with some novel policies furnished it by the Social Justice Commission and its own internal debates. Yet it will also come into power pledged to continue the workings of the current economic and social system and to essentially manage the status quo in a better and less corrupt way than the Tories have done.

Labor's transformation makes parliamentary politics a truly dull sport these days: Dreamers and idealists have been banished and the technocrats are in control of the asylum. The change in Labor is perhaps best symbolized in a speech Blair made at a conference in London last summer. To an audience that included many ex-members of the Social Democratic Party, a grouping that split from Labor to pursue a more rightward course, Blair outlined his vision of an ethical socialism that would appeal to Britain's political center. He ended with a jibe mocking Labor's past obsession with analysis and internal debate: "In the past it was said that if you told a joke at a Conservative conference they laughed. If you told the same joke at a Labor Conference the conference would divide into discussion groups to discuss it." The audience laughed. ◀

Sasha Abramsky, a journalist living in New York City, writes frequently about British politics.



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VIEWPOINT

A vote of confidence

By George Pillsbury and Rob Richie

The most important lesson to be learned from last November's election won't be found in Professor Gingrich's syllabus. The ascendancy of the Republicans is due not only to the decay of the Democratic Party, but to the calcification of American democracy itself.

Consider this: the GOP took control of the House of Representatives with support from only 18 percent of eligible voters. Republicans may talk about a "mandate," but they captured just half of the 36 percent of the electorate who cast ballots in congressional contests. In other words, most voters either voted against the Republicans or chose not to participate in the election at all.

The majority of Americans simply no longer vote. They are turned off by the lack of choices, alienated by negative campaigns, discouraged by the narrowness of the issues raised and frustrated by the impotence of even our best elected officials in the face of powerful private interests. With two-thirds of eligible voters staying home, the candidate with the clearest mandate was "none of the above."

What's wrong? Why is our country last in the world in voter turnout? Critics commonly point to superficial media coverage, the baleful role of big money and the general ossification of the two political parties.

But the bigger issue may be the question of how we vote. Increasingly, political theorists and organizers have begun to question the inherent unfairness of a winner-take-all election system. Established 200 years ago when only white, male property owners could vote, our winner-take-all system is out of step with our multicultural society, unable to fill our need for diverse debate and broad representation. Almost all of the world's democracies have

abandoned this kind of voting in favor of more inclusive proportional voting methods, which allow candidates to win with lower vote percentages (or thresholds) in multi-seat districts. Under proportional representation (PR), parties or individuals gain seats in legislative assemblies in proportion to their share of the popular vote. The more voters who can elect candidates of their choice, the more proportional the results will be.

Time and again in our elections we are asked to vote for a "lesser of two evils." Because of our exclusive reliance on winner-take-all voting (usually in "single-member districts" where only one candidate can win), we are reduced to only two effective choices, generally a Democrat and a Republican. With such limited choices, chances are slim that candidates will reflect the views and interests of the broader electorate.

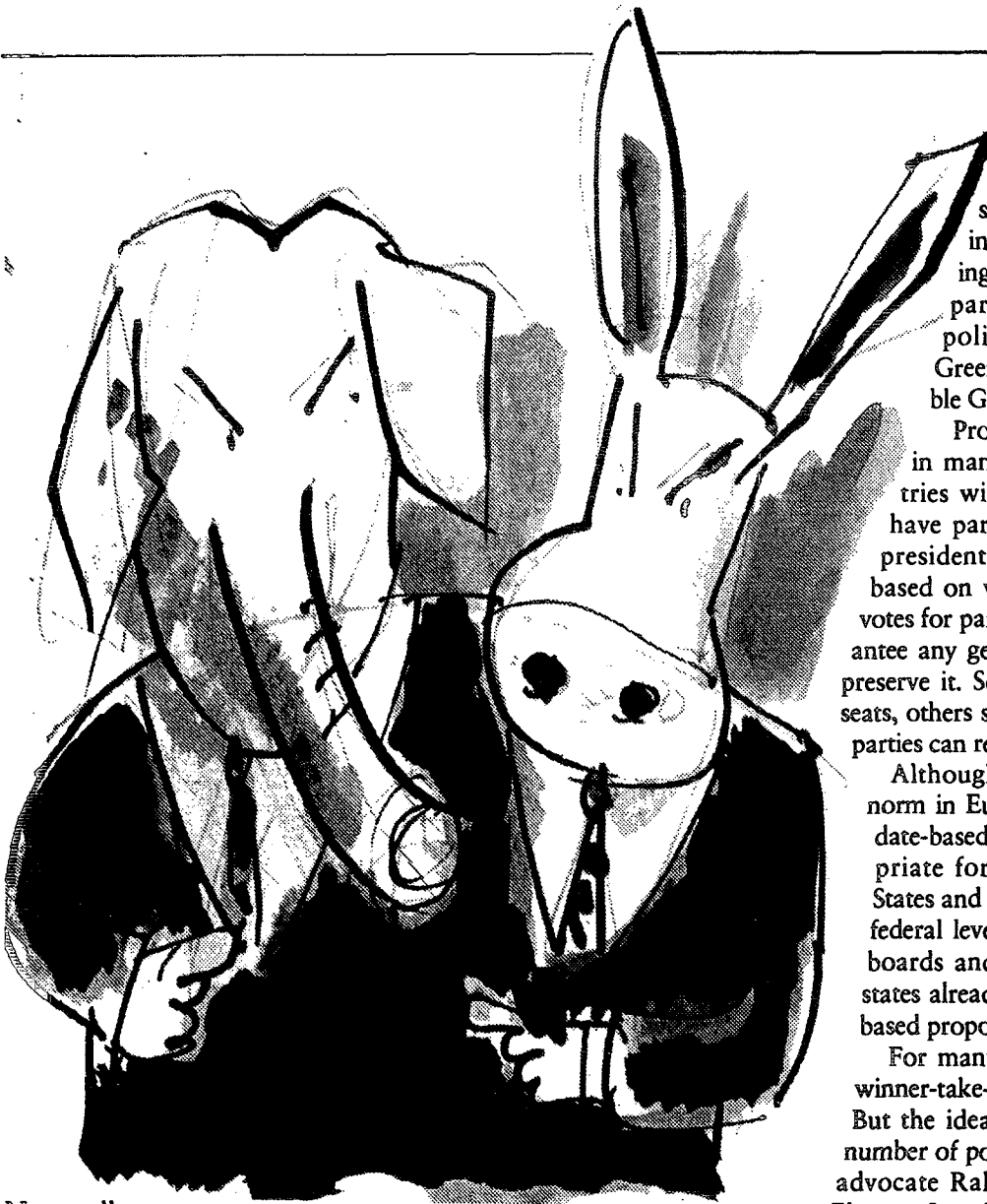
Our winner-take-all system makes it nearly impossible to mount a credible third-party challenge to the Democrat-Republican monopoly—as the Greens, the New Party and others almost certainly will learn if they try to succeed in the current election system. With upwards of 50 percent of the vote necessary to win a seat, third parties and candidates are effectively confined to the margins, serving as vehicles for protest votes or—worse—merely as "spoilers."

Even the limited choices we have today are often an illusion. In many races, legislative gerrymandering has determined the winners before the first ballot is cast. Aided by sophisticated computers, elected officials design safe districts based on information about the electorate's income, race, partisanship and likelihood of voting. And so it hardly comes as a surprise that in the 1994 elections, 67 percent of congressional candidates ran unopposed or won by landslides. At the state level, such "no-choice" elections run as high as 80-90 percent.

Lack of choices limits new ideas. The two-party system leads candidates away from ideology as they fight over the same group of undecided "swing voters"—the alleged center. When the *Boston Globe* described the Senate race between Ted Kennedy and Mitt Romney as a "battle for ... white men over the age of 40," they could have been describing any number of nearly indistinguishable campaigns all over the country.

Instead of broad debate on issues, we get negativity. During the fall campaign, voters were treated to a virtual "air war" as attack ads saturated local television and radio markets. And while voters told pollsters they were turned off by the mudslinging, survey research suggested that the ads *worked*—at least for those likely to vote. A Catch-22?

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Not really.

Negative campaigning is just another by-product of zero-sum politics. With just one opponent to beat and only the swing voters to worry about, it's more to your advantage to discredit your rival than to promote your own platform.

Meanwhile, proportional voting has become a new standard for democracy around the world. For example, Bishop Desmond Tutu and Nelson Mandela both saw proportional representation as essential to ensure the future of a multicultural South Africa—even though the African National Congress would have gained more in the short term from a winner-take-all system. In the words of Tutu, "The system of proportional representation ensures that virtually every constituency in the country will have a hearing in the national and provincial legislatures."

Halfway across the globe, New Zealand recently scuttled its winner-take-all system in favor of a system that allows real choices. Inspired by a remarkable grass-roots campaign mounted against the country's well-financed Business Roundtable, voters there adopted a mixed-member propor-

tional system in which half of the seats are filled from districts and the other half are elected proportionately to reflect support for different parties. And in Germany last fall a similar voting system provided voters with six party choices, ranging across the political spectrum from right to Green. Seventy-nine percent of eligible German voters went to the polls.

Proportional representation comes in many different guises. Some countries with proportional representation have parliamentary systems, some have presidential systems. Some systems are based on votes for candidates, others on votes for parties. Some methods do not guarantee any geographical representation, some preserve it. Some allow many parties to win seats, others set thresholds to limit how many parties can realistically win.

Although party-based systems are the norm in Europe and Latin America, candidate-based systems are likely more appropriate for local elections in the United States and may be more viable for state and federal levels as well. City councils, school boards and county commissions in seven states already use one or another candidate-based proportional method in their elections.

For many, the notion of modifying our winner-take-all system may seem farfetched. But the idea has the support of a growing number of political reformers, from consumer advocate Ralph Nader and feminist leader Eleanor Smeal to populist conservative Kevin

Phillips and voting rights activist Lani Guinier. Third-party supporters—from Libertarians to Greens—are also beginning to put proportional representation high on their reform agenda. Organizers in Seattle, San Francisco and Eugene, Ore., are planning initiative campaigns by 1996.

The choice of voting systems is not an academic one. It's a choice between fundamentally different models of democracy. Our current system provides only two "choices," pushes all debate to the center and excludes divergent views—all in the name of "stability." Proportional representation, by contrast, opens the way for viable third parties, diverse representation, a broader range of ideas and a more open, consensus-building government. It creates a positive-sum environment, inviting all to participate—and to earn their fair share of power and a place at the table of government. ◀

George Pillsbury is a board member of the Center for Voting and Democracy, which is based in Washington, D.C. Rob Richle is its executive director.

I N T H E A R T S

Maiden America

D

Death and the Maiden takes place, according to an opening title card, "in a South American country after the fall of the dictatorship." Ariel Dorfman's play, on which the movie is based, added in its stage directions, "a country that is probably Chile," which is Dorfman's homeland. But Chile doesn't make it into the movie version.

No doubt the omission stems from the general perception in the entertainment industry that detailed historical references just confuse American filmgoers (which is why, for instance, the play *The Madness of George III* has come out as the movie *The Madness of King George*—movie marketers feared that multiplex denizens would wonder how they missed *Madness I and II*). But in *Death and the Maiden*, the lack of geopolitical specificity has more to do with streamlin-

ing a play about political atrocities into a more consumable piece of entertainment, something that can be taken in between bites of buttered popcorn and gulps of Dr. Pepper. This attempt to make it more palatable to folks looking for a night out is a little like the NEA sucking up to the Republican Congress. In both cases, however, no matter how you package it, the target audience simply does not want to hear what you have to say. Most people go out of their way not to be reminded of something so depressing as torture—even a poster and ads that prominently feature Sigourney Weaver caressing a pistol don't quite sell *Death and the Maiden* as an action thriller.

Nevertheless, in director Roman Polanski's hands, *Death and the Maiden* is a decidedly sleek political thriller with shrewd and often moving performances. This is Polanski's best work in some time—a comment not so much on *Death and the Maiden* as on such sleazy follies as last year's *Bitter Moon*. Sigourney Weaver, her brow furrowed with Oscar ambition, is compulsively watchable

as Paulina, a woman who is certain that the man who stops to help her husband with a flat tire is none other than her former torturer. Paulina's husband, Gerardo, is played by Stuart Wilson with a perfect mix of good intentions and fuzzy-minded equivocation. He is a flabby liberal who owes Paulina his life. Trying to catch Gerardo, the death squads kidnapped and tortured her to learn his whereabouts, which she did not divulge. In hiding, he survived the dictatorship unscathed, and under the new democracy Gerardo has emerged as a prominent defender of human rights. She's been reduced to a basket case who eats her supper in the closet. As the movie begins, Gerardo has just been persuaded by the president, much to Paulina's dismay, to head a commission that will investigate (and almost certainly whitewash) the atrocities of the former regime.

Ben Kingsley, trim and mustachioed, plays Dr. Miranda, the good Samaritan whom Paulina identifies by his voice as the physician who blindfolded her and raped her repeatedly in prison. She turns the tables on him when he comes back late at night to share a drink



Death and the Maiden
Directed by
Roman Polanski

In an attempt to appeal to U.S. audiences, Roman Polanski makes a tasteful movie about torture.

By Pat Dowell

PHOTOS © FINE LINE FEATURES/FRANCOIS DUHAMEL



with her unsuspecting husband. When the men fall asleep, Paulina ties Miranda up, pistol-whips him and subjects him to a midnight interrogation of exactly the sort she once suffered, even dictating a confession for him to sign. She also repeats her torturer's device of playing the Schubert quartet for which the play and movie are named. Gerardo is horrified and incredulous, but he, like the audience, begins to wonder about Miranda as the night wears on.

Kingsley's ingenious performance, with its shrouded hints of malevolence and convincing air of indignation, is the best in the film. In Ariel Dorfman's play, you weren't quite sure whether the doctor was really guilty. That is not the case in the movie; indeed, the movie's most breathtaking, sickening moment is Miranda's closing monologue on the matter. While the rest of the movie tries (and largely fails) to illuminate the relationship of tortured and torturer by simply reversing their roles, Miranda's convulsive confession does expose something at the heart of all violence—not just its most extreme manifestation, torture. Miranda says he came to the jail, with misgivings, to treat the prisoners and then succumbed to the opportunity for exercising absolute power over a helpless woman. It is a chilling

glimpse into the depths of human depravity that makes most of the movie's preceding scenes seem like a very kinky after-dinner game.

The real problem with *Death and the Maiden*, however, is not tastelessness on the part of Polanski or co-producer and co-screenwriter Dorfman. Mercifully, they have decided there will be no attempt at parlor-trick ethnicity; they wisely dispense with the excruciatingly bogus Hispanic accents or skin-tints that Hollywood often employs—although in some lights Wilson's tan looks suspicious. No, what made me most uncomfortable was precisely the good taste involved in this handsome production. There's something indecent about the beauty of this film, about putting a gloss on word pictures of the most humiliating torture and rape, about posing this dilemma for a civil society—what shall we do with the perpetrators of political crimes?—as an opportunity for an actress to win a major award. Dorfman, I'm sure, had more on his mind, but whatever it was is diminished by the aggressively depoliticizing consumer marketplace that is now its venue. Despite brief moments of real political insight, *Death and the Maiden* has been reduced to mere entertainment. ▴

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IN PRINT

How to succeed in business

By Bill Boisvert

As a consultant, lecturer and management guru, Tom Peters is probably the biggest draw around on today's business-seminar circuit around. But in his latest book, *The Pursuit of Wow!*, he drops his jack-of-no-trades camouflage and emerges as the most radical literary stylist in America, seamlessly blending the voices of James Joyce and Lee Iacocca, with an overlay of cyberpunk nihilism. His style is almost as difficult to read as it is to define, and we must often simply drift through the flotsam of hygienic pointers ("dress for success," "mind your manners"), motivational platitudes ("Make that call NOW! Don't let problems fester!") and product placements ("I love the Ball Pentel Fine Point R50 pens. ... I love the look, feel, ink flow. And I buy mine at Ryman's shops in London—can't find them in the U.S. for the life of me") that make up the great bulk of the text. But amid the nattering, blustery, dreamlike thought fragments that litter this mess of a book, we can dimly perceive the ideological battles that trouble the world of business literature.

In *Wow!*, Peters continues to elaborate the world-view he's developed in previous best sellers like *In Search of Excellence* and *Liberation Management*. His ideas range beyond prosaic concerns of business organization to embrace far-flung theories of science, history and art. The epistemological core of his work focuses on the new information technology as a source of chaotic destruction and renewal: the growing flood of knowledge and computing power, far from making things *more* stable and predictable, will make the world profoundly evanescent and unknowable. Around this seeming contradiction Peters builds a theory of chance, uncertainty and upheaval; he decries "planning" as the apostasy of corporate executives, union negotiators and government bureaucrats.

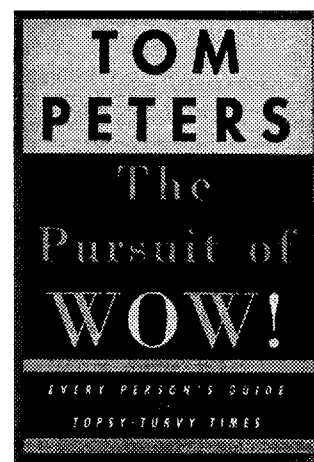
Peters finds evidence of this reprehensible clinging to the

predictable everywhere he looks. He even complains that "most of today's aging execs don't study quantum mechanics." Newton's orderly, calculable landscape of billiard balls and tidily orbiting satellites has given way, he says, to the misty, flickering world of wave-particle duality, where companies are both solvent *and* bankrupt until you do an audit. For Peters, any attempt to plan and stabilize the corporate world defies the laws of nature *at the subatomic level*.

Peters' study of history in *Liberation Management* bore out his doctrine of adaptability and rapid change as the key to survival, leading him to recommend Genghis Khan's Mongol horde as a corporate model. The Mongols' basic unit of organization, the "group of freelance bandits," admirably adapted itself to conditions of stress and chaos, and fostered a climate of egalitarianism under a heroic leadership. They easily conquered the agrarian civilizations, which foolishly relied on crop-growing to ensure a stable food supply—a mistake that bred timidity, feudalism and slavery. Peters uses similar terms to celebrate modern-day entrepreneurs, singing arias to their barbarian manliness and camaraderie as they gallop through burning villages, ponies laden with swag, lords of a "chaotic" economy where bandit companies ride down the dispirited weaklings who crave order and security.

The Mongol horde metaphor aptly sums up Peters' appalling vision of the future. Once, the word "progress" meant a general advance of civilization, a one-way accretion of wealth, knowledge, leisure and neighborliness. No more. To Peters, progress means the constant acceleration of competition as a mystical end in itself, a celebration of pure violence and upheaval in a zero-sum Valhalla where winners can win and losers should lose. Humanity's toil has no other end than the carving of new market niches, fetid hatcheries where a cancerous proliferation of product lines germinate and devour one another.

This paradigm leads Peters to emphasize rapid product introduction as a key to corporate success. According to Peters, healthy corporations are roiling with hives of gutsy executives called "product champions," each one enraptured by a delphic vision of superficial novelty—perhaps of a soft drink with an advanced sweetener or unprecedented hue—and willing to go to the wall to bring it to market. But Peters refuses to recognize that as entrepre-



The Pursuit of WOW!

By Tom Peters

Vintage

349 pp., \$14

neurs offer products increasingly alike and increasingly remote from the satisfaction of human needs, they find it hard to tell if any given product will find a market. Marketing becomes a probabilistic phenomenon, like radioactive decay; all a company can do is accelerate the pace and volume of product introductions and pray that someone, somewhere, will succumb to their advertising and find a use for one of them.

Today's postmodern entrepreneurs thus exhort their minions to a life of unexamined freneticism. "We eat change for breakfast!" sputters one of Peters' favorite executives. "Change something, anything, each day. Just start it, do something!" Peters asks Ted Turner to expound on his business philosophy, and is floored by Turner's guttural response: "Do It!" But doubts sometimes gnaw at executives. Do *what*? they may wonder. And whatever It is, *why* should they Do It in the first place? Peters warns executives never to ask such things, lest demoralization and obsolescence creep in. For in the split second it takes merely to pose these questions, their companies have already fallen uncounted generations behind in the cycle of new product development.

But in the Peters pantheon, above all the entrepreneurs and product champions, customers reign supreme. Business writers worship these deities—their exacting standards, their fickle tastes, their ceaseless trawling for new stuff to buy and not buy. Satisfying such profoundly self-absorbed, narcissistic customers requires a particularly clammy, degrading sort of *emotional* work. Employees must ingratiate themselves by "going belly-to-belly with customers," and "intertwining with customers in ever more intimate ways."

Taking up the cause of the offended consumer, Peters has sworn a crusade against a supposed epidemic of bad attitude among service workers, jousting endlessly with surly reservations clerks and telephone repairmen and reveling in every excess of retail obsequiousness. Bad hotel service is an inescapable leitmotif of Peters' writings, very occasionally brightened by some tiny epiphany of hospitality, as when a Bangkok hotel limousine driver offers him ice-cold towels to relieve the sweltering heat. He even opens *In Search of Excellence* with an ode to Washington's Four Seasons Hotel simply because the concierge there remembered his name (although we get the feeling that Peters is a difficult guest to forget). He seems to pine for a simulacrum of a seigniorial economy, structured around extravagant displays of personal obligation and dependency, where liveried menials stand poised to sop up every drop of sweat that drips from their master's brow.

Peters' blowzy dogmas and eccentric nitpickings are by and large fairly innocuous; his shameless and uncritical shilling for capitalism usually goes no further than hero-worship and commodity fetishism. He carefully delivers the requisite obeisances to corporate diversity and multiculturalism, encourages companies to hire the disabled, and speaks out with conviction against America's current plague of immigrant-bashing, although from a not entirely progressive

stance ("Love to see those hungry folks from South Asia, East and Southeast Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean surging toward our borders! ... Their intense drive to succeed and willingness to work tirelessly...." etc., etc.).

But where his ideas intersect with meatier management theories we get a creepier vision of business ideology. One of Peters' favorite topics is the "virtual corporation." The model is supposed to replace the hidebound "real" corporation of the past, which produced a single unchanging product for a captive mass market; the stability of the regime allowed companies to display a certain paternalism towards workers, offering long-term employment at secure wages. The virtual corporation, on the other hand, relies almost entirely on subcontractors, part-timers and temp-workers to perform ad-hoc tasks in a fluid and ill-defined marketplace. Peters' favorite examples are entertainment companies that "produce" performance art. The real advantage of the virtual corporation is fanatical labor discipline: a "subcontractor" who screws up just once will never be hired for a job again. He rhapsodizes about the self-actualization that the worker-entrepreneurs who staff virtual corporations can achieve, admonishing employers never to "treat a temp like a temp ... show them respect and trust, give them real responsibilities." But the payoff for the worker is nebulous—"respect" and "trust" in lieu of salary and benefits.

In his championship of the virtual corporation, as well as in many other aspects, Peters is challenging another fashionable school of management theory, Total Quality Management. TQM, whose leading American exponent was the recently deceased W. Edwards Deming, is credited with helping Japanese companies capture the world's export markets after the Second World War. In opposition to Peters' obsession with the "excellence" of individual workers, TQM holds that workers have little control over the quality of the products they make; only fundamental improvements in production systems can change the overall quality of products. Instead of "product champions" and entrepreneurs whose intuitive leaps drive product development, TQM emphasizes controlled, systematic changes in the variables of production to discover better ways of doing things. And instead of introducing Peters' mantra of "chaos" and "hyper-competition" into the relations of production, TQM advocates stability and cooperation, with guaranteed employment for workers and long-term contracts between suppliers and clients.

But the fact that businesspeople pay lip-service to a relatively benign system like TQM is no cause for optimism. As *The Pursuit of Wow!* demonstrates, there are strong currents in business ideology tending against TQM. Peter's euphemisms—"entrepreneurship," "global competitiveness" and "flexible labor markets"—are just a smoke screen for an intensified regimen of worker oppression and mindless consumerism. Tedious as they may be, it's time progressives started paying attention to the fantasies of Tom Peters and his ilk, lest we awake one morning and find that *Wow!* has finally caught up with us. ◀

Down by law

By David Futrelle

The marketing department of Random House must love this one: a book that attacks both lawyers and bureaucrats at once, complete with juicy anecdotes just ripe for plucking by lazy columnists in search of material to fill their space. In *The Death of Common Sense: How Law is Suffocating America*, Howard advances the least controversial of theses: that our legal system has become too complicated for its own good. And he takes on the least controversial of enemies: the legal meddlers whose instinctual response to even the smallest of contingencies is to draft another law, to formulate another rule, to add another page to an ever-growing stack of regulations covering everything from proper pollution control to the grain of the wood in the office stepladder.

Howard is not one for such complexity. Indeed, the book's thesis is simplicity itself—though perhaps “simplistic” would be a better word for it. “The drive for certainty has destroyed, not enhanced, law's ability to act as a guide,” he writes. Laws have become so complex, and therefore so unknowable, Howard argues, that it is no wonder that companies find it hard to do the right thing. And so they stumble about trying to meet this or that requirement and fill out the proper forms, getting so mixed up in legalities and paperwork that they can't get anything done at all.

Howard fills the book with horror stories on the dangers of rigid bureaucracy: how Mother Teresa and a group of nuns trying to build a homeless shelter in New York found themselves stymied by too-rigid housing laws and had to give the project up; the four-employee meatpacking plant in Oregon with two USDA inspectors on duty most of the time; the legendary 140 OSHA regulations on ladder safety.

Howard's solution? A kind of legal laissez-faire. Relax, sit back, repeal a law or two. “Whenever the rules are eased,” Howard writes, waxing poetic, “our energy and good sense pour in like sunlight through opened blinds.” The very thought of this kind of deregulation sends Howard into a kind of trance, from which emerge (as from an oracle) sentences like this: “People constantly making judgments is the breeze that drives out dank air and invigorates

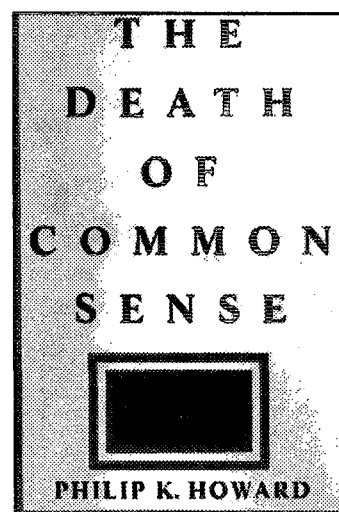
us.” (And people writing comprehensible English is a good way to write a book.)

Of course, the “people” Howard prefers are invariably *businesspeople*. And his villains are invariably those that stand in the way of the free exercise of good business sense. Don't those environmentalists know that laws only mess up corporate efforts to keep clean? Don't those pesky civil rights advocates realize that “today's discrimination claims ... lack an anchor of reliable fact,” since “[m]ost employers don't get rid of good workers.”

This is an effective legal brief, if nothing more—all persuasion and no substance. Howard's accumulation of anecdotes doesn't, in the end, serve to prove anything in particular. It's not as if there are hordes of saints waiting to build homeless shelters; there are, though, hordes of slumlords who would be happy to take advantage of housing deregulation.

In fact, many of the most effective law-complicators are not bureaucrats perversely intent on increasing the level of confusion in the world, but representatives of the very businessmen whom Howard holds in such esteem—teams of lawyers in search of loopholes in every rule, corporate lobbyists that have turned Washington into what political commentator William Greider calls “the grand bazaar.” Corporations clog up hearing rooms with “experts” spouting convenient nonsense; they hire skillful skills to bend the ears of congressmen with heartfelt pleas for this or that wording for such-and-such a clause in the appendix of some obscure bill. The result of all this special-interest dealing may not look particularly rational from the point of view of the outsider, but the lobbyists pursue their minute goals with the utmost rationality. No, such bills don't serve the public interest. They are not designed to.

In the end, *The Death of Common Sense* merely obscures the problem it sets out to describe. But the book also obscures its own duplicity: casual readers will put down the book with a vague feeling that something is rotten in the world, and that somehow “big government” is implicated in the crime. But of course law is not the problem; it is the symptom of a problem that Howard's solution—deregulation—will only make worse. Howard would make a fine lawyer. Oh—there it is on the dust jacket: that's just what he is. ◀



**The Death of Common Sense:
How Law is Suffocating America**
By Philip K. Howard
Random House
202 pp., \$18

Public exposure

By Rick Perlstein

A haiku is delivered one night on the Manhattan-bound F train: "They *slammin'*, son, just *slammin'*! Word to your mother, the girls at this party/They be *all* that—and *change*, son!" The kid holds his strap-hanging entourage in thrall. He's 17 maybe, and, like many African-Americans in Brooklyn, West Indian. His brogue slices and darts—he's *on*. His arms cut swathes in the air, and when he does a little pivot on his unlaced sneakers, the loose folds of his pants ruffle slightly in his excitation. Me, I stare "out" the window—but really use its reflection to indulge my voyeurism. A few feet away, an attractive Hispanic woman in her 30s quietly clutches the lapels of her blazer together and turns her head, as if unconsciously. And as the young black men unfold a miniature dance of comradeship, making the trains theirs in a society that gives them little that is truly their own, midtown-bound suits warily shrink into themselves behind *Newsday* and the *New York Times*. White hipsters peer from *Village Voices* to register twinges of jealousy for the teenagers' easy flow.

In its barely concealed tensions, the train ride is a microcosm of New York, written in the bodies. When I recounted to a co-worker this small struggle for cultural control of the train car, where factions guard their positions through means as subtle as a glance averted, he compared it to the trains in London. "No one even *looks* at anyone there. No one peeps from behind their newspapers, and when people talk to each other, they whisper."

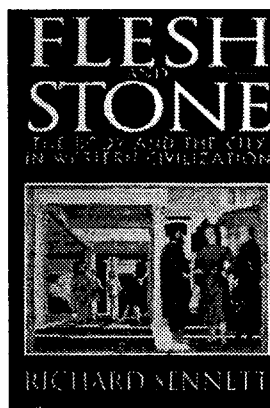
In the difference between these New York and London commutes lies the animating idea of Richard Sennett's new book, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*. Sennett, a professor of humanities at New York University and author of some 13 works of scholarship and three novels, here provocatively promises "a history of the city told through people's bodily experience: how women and men moved, what they saw and heard, the smells that assailed their noses, where they ate, how they dressed, when they bathed, how they made love in cities from ancient Athens to modern New York."

That sounds like a promising investigation, and the time is ripe for it. Weaving two vibrant historical discussions togeth-

er—of bodies and of cities, flesh and stone—could make for an exciting synthesis that could let us understand our present in exciting new ways. The notion that since attitudes about bodies have varied so radically across time and space, people's core *experiences* of their bodies must have been radically different as well, is one of the most fascinating and productive in recent historical scholarship. And at the same time as body history makes it mark, some of the most exciting cultural investigation of late takes the geography of the city as its theme. The central insight of this work: We build the spaces that we live in; in turn, our environments build us, configuring the very boundaries of our social horizons.

If anyone is up to a project this capacious, it's Richard Sennett. Sennett only knows how to think big—his work has always ranged masterfully across time, geography and scholarly discipline. And the man's got *soul*: Few have visited so much ethical rigor on the question of why life seems so damned cold and nasty in the waning years of this millennium. Throughout his career, Sennett has spun out a compelling framework to answer why this is so. All his books, novels included, investigate how our social structures, our built environments and our very images of ourselves all militate against the realization of our fundamental interconnectedness to one another.

Two Sennett classics have been of particular value to progressives who want to break the spell of this narcissism in order to imagine a more humane future. His 1974 classic *The Fall of Public Man* probes the 18th- and 19th-century roots of our withered sense of social obligation; *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972) presents a richly nuanced portrait of the weighty emotional costs of America's misbegotten belief that anyone can "make it" if they just work hard enough. Both tug at your emotions while throwing off intellectual sparks, in a way that most scholarly tomes couldn't do if they tried. And both argue, through their very different manifest subject matter, that issues properly seen as public and political (why our cities are collapsing; why there is class injustice) are wrongfully seen in our society as *personal* (cities are screwed up because of morally failed individuals, criminals; people don't achieve upward mobility because of their own lack of pluck). In the '90s, "public" officials from Bill Clinton to Clarence Thomas point to their own bootstraps as a badge of moral election, while signing away any properly public vision of social renewal whatsoever, and the left fiddles with identity politics while the social



Flesh and Stone:
The Body and the City
in Western Civilization
By Richard Sennett
Norton
431 pp., \$27.50



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safety net burns. Sennett, with his profound moral vision and historical acuity, might just be the one to make some sense of this god-awful mess.

It's unfortunate that his new book doesn't do the trick. Any work as broad in scope as *Flesh and Stone* stands or falls on the ability of its author to synthesize widely disparate material into a compelling message. *Flesh and Stone's* connections misfire and its interpretations stretch thin ideas past their breaking point, all to fill out a big picture that never quite materializes. And, even though his prose is unfailingly elegant and his arguments hardly intimidating, the book is a chore to read. It's *boring*—about as boring as a book that moves from a salacious perusal of ancient Athenian sexual practices; to an investigation of Athenian women's underground rituals involving dismembered pigs; to a discussion of a Roman emperor murdering a dissenting architecture critic, and naming a city after his boy lover; to the story of a ragtag band of Jesus freaks taking over the world; to descriptions of Jewish doctors in medieval Venice forced to dress in chicken suits ... well, it's about as boring as a book talking about all that neat stuff could possibly be.

I wish I could lay out here his argument for how Greece links to Rome links to Venice links to the decline of Washington Square Park, but alas, Sennett himself can't manage the task. His story is merely episodic, and at that, the episodes don't even hang together on their own. We start, for example, in ancient Greece; and then we start in ancient Rome, and then in medieval Venice. And so on. To coin a bodily metaphor, the kind of writing Sennett does in this book makes for a reading experience akin to coitus interruptus; you turn over the page to find that stories from Greece to Greenwich Village have suddenly and surprisingly ended before any satisfying intellectual resolution has been achieved.

Take the first chapter, on ancient Greek democracy. Sennett explains that Greek citizens—who were of course, all men, and rich men at that, a point Sennett hardly mentions at all—walked around quite nearly naked. And as the

loose folds of their clothing signified the profound value citizens placed on openness to each other, the open architecture of their public spaces, like the Parthenon, signified their commitment to openness in rhetoric. At this, Sennett cobbles a conclusion about the vulnerabilities of democratic speech, through the vulnerability of the body. That seems an intriguing point, and Sennett serves up some tantalizing details to make it. But the argument is never quite demonstrated for the reader's satisfaction; one gets the feeling that Sennett is pulling this stuff out of the thin air of merely formal similarities—naked bodies, naked buildings—without giving any convincing evidence that the flesh had much to do with the stone.

A few of Sennett's historical episodes do succeed on their own, however. The chapter on pre-Christian, imperial Rome is one. As their empire spread outward into the hinterlands, the Romans built cookie-cutter cities to cement their influence. Towns all the way from Egypt to Gaul were built identically, concentrically outward from a central "navel," their grid layout obsessively mirroring that of the Pantheon in Rome. This, in turn was modeled on an idealized vision of the human form later drawn most famously by Leonardo da Vinci—a standing man, navel dead-center, surrounded by a circle that he limns with the tips of his outstretched arms and the bottoms of his feet. Such a need to anchor the city in the perceived eternal verities of the human body, Sennett explains, "expressed the need of an uneasy, unequal, and unwieldy people seeking the reassurances of place; the forms sought to convey that a durable, essential

Rome stood somehow outside the ruptures of history." This is the most convincing argument in a book that explicitly promises to use history to explain the malaise of *contemporary* cities, and of the connection of imperial Rome to modern New York, Sennett gives not even the barest hints.

To see why he fails in *Flesh and Stones*, we could start with how he soars in *The Fall of Public Man*. The two volumes, separated by 20 years, are companion studies in many ways. In *Fall*, Sennett argues that our society is diseased by its seemingly benign "belief in direct human relations on an intimate scale," which, he argues, "has seduced us from converting our understanding of the realities of power into guides for our own political behavior." But what's wrong with intimacy? We can gloss it this way: Americans believe that emotional disclosure is the key to individual and social health; but even though on the TV each and every afternoon individuals intimately disclose with ever-greater abandon, people are more afraid of each other than ever before. This fetid talk-show civilization and its discontents Sennett calls our "tyranny of intimacy." He presents the paradox that by keeping us from coming to terms with each on an *impersonal* level, the cult of intimacy forecloses the possibility of achieving a just social contract that builds up rather than walls off. In fact, the squishy and stupid myth that disclosing our interior selves is the only road to the respect of others denies the brute fact that most people will always be strangers. "Masses of people are concerned with their single life-histories and particular emotions as never before; this concern has proved to be a trap rather than a liberation." Better, says Richard Sennett, that we learn how to trust strangers.

This is a remarkably subtle and delicately wrought insight, neither too facile nor too abstract, and Sennett ranges all over the intellectual, geographical and historical map to make it hang together. But hang together it does, and the reader is all the more exhilarated for the daring of the accomplishment. *Flesh and Stone* yields no such central paradigm, for all its flash and dash. And so when Sennett delivers his would-be stirring conclusion, it rings hollow. "For people in a multi-cultural city to care about one another," booms his concluding chapter on his own Manhattan neighborhood, "we have to change the understanding we have of our own bodies. We will never experience the difference of others until we acknowledge the bodily insufficiencies in ourselves." When I heard Richard Sennett deliver this line in a packed lecture hall at the University of Michigan this past spring, I thought, gee, that sounds fascinating, but I have no idea what it means. Can't wait for the book to come out to find out. And alas, here's the book, but I still have that same vague feeling that Sennett may be on to something very big with this bodies and cities thing—I think about the daily war of bodies on the F train, but also about how those wonderful park benches in Paris invite couples to embrace in about a dozen different ways—but that he hasn't been able to tell me just what it is. ◀

Rick Perlstein is staff writer at *Linguafra* magazine in New York.

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The forest and the tree

By Ilan Stavans

Marta Traba saw herself as a south-of-the-border Joan of Arc. A left-wing Argentine novelist and cultural commentator, she made a virtual career out of tweaking the bourgeoisie, her own class, for its near-sightedness and frivolity. "I feel that the class from which I come is mean, stupid and dishonest," Traba once told an interviewer. "Middle-class women are a caste of parasites who take to the streets in Chile to bang on the pots and pans they never scour in the kitchen, who play canasta in Colombia, who gossip as they sit under hair-dryers in beauty parlors everywhere." Not surprisingly, she found herself in the thick of one controversy after another. Yet she claimed not to relish the battles. "I don't like to get into fights," she would repeat, "But I have to, because it is my duty. I would prefer to live in a just society and serve it with meekness, loyalty and passion. ... My incredible struggles are always against forces that could reduce me to dust."

In 1983, along with her husband, the literary critic Angel Rama, Traba died in a plane crash on a hill near Madrid's Barajas Airport. At 53, she had been at the height of her powers, a dynamo of creativity. She had taught at Harvard, Middlebury, M.I.T., and other academic institutions, had lectured extensively around the globe and had written both historical monographs and award-winning fiction, including *Mothers and Shadows*, a dialogue of resistance among ordinary women.

Earlier that year, Traba had been formally invited by the Art Museum of the Americas in Washington, D.C. to curate an interactive installation of the museum's permanent collection of Latin American art. She was delighted with the idea. The installation would provide her the opportunity to make the case that Latin American art was much more than a derivative product, an imitation of European and U.S. styles and aesthetic movements, as Traba's predecessors had so often assumed. Traba hoped to show how Latin Ameri-

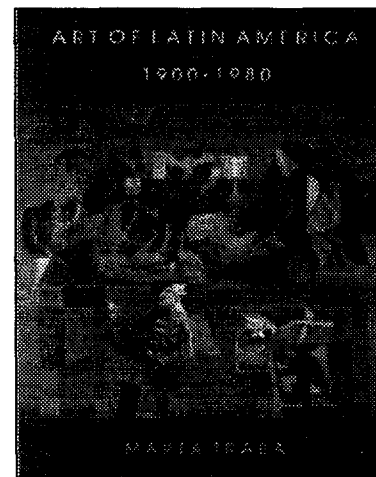
can artists used their work to define a collective identity, to explain the hybrid of alien, heterogeneous cultures at the heart of their culture.

Not long before the plane crash, Traba submitted a first draft of a manuscript meant for the exhibition's catalogue. Now at last, after years in which the manuscript sat in storage, Traba's supporters have finally found a happy way to deliver it to print. The result, *Art of Latin America, 1900-1980*, is an exciting, insightful, occasionally infuriating analysis, handsomely illustrated, detailing a people's struggle for self-definition. (Belisario Betancur, Colombia's ex-president, is among those responsible for bringing it to print; he contributes a polite foreword to the book.)

Traba's contribution was not, to be sure, wholly original. Important art critics, most notably Octavio Paz, the Nobel Prize-winning Mexican poet and essayist, have examined the art of the region in a broad cultural perspective. In his *Essays on Mexican Art*, Paz describes Latin American art through the eyes of an anthropologist, a historian and a poet. In his view, the region's art encapsulates its pilgrimage toward an identity, showing the continual give-and-take between foreign and native sources, the constant bargaining of heterogeneous forces.

Traba's own views were not unlike those of Paz, but she was interested in a historic, not a philosophical, appreciation. Unlike many of her colleagues, she insisted on bringing Latin American art to its people, making them active participants. She disliked voyeurism, challenging the passive, contemplative approach toward art. "In my analysis," she once argued, "my aim is less to persuade than to provoke a reaction, to tell the public: These images belong to you; take possession of them."

Consequently, Traba's readiness to infuriate often overcame her desire to explain. She would offer a bold hypothesis but deprive it of proper development, planting it as dynamite almost in spite of its intellectual value. Latin America, she argued in one case, has been described as a "Surrealist continent," although the theories of the European surrealists and their "planned fantasies" had no repercussions in the region whatsoever. Well, she was right, but it is a comment that needs



**Art of Latin America,
1900-1980**

By Marta Traba
Inter-American Development
Bank and Johns Hopkins
University Press
178 pp., \$29.95



some explaining and perhaps some qualification. Andre Breton, Antonin Artaud and other surrealists drank from Latin America's cultural well, portraying the reality across the Pacific Ocean as mysterious, primitive, dreamlike; but it was Alejo Carpentier and others on this side who argued that surrealism was less a fashion than an inherent attribute of the Latin American mind. The stereotyping was truly a mutual enterprise.

Art of Latin America focuses on the region's acknowledgement and embrace of modernity, beginning with the Mexican muralists who used art to explore social themes, to seek justice and freedom. Their involvement with Indians and mestizos fascinated her, and their original forms of expression, she argued, opened up a new terrain for pictorial art south of the Rio Grande. Traba's travels through Latin American art, while hardly an effortless journey for the reader, are rich in detail. The book discusses almost every country in the hemisphere (including some, like Brazil, which have normally been ignored). By focusing on nations and only afterward on major figures, her objective was to offer a panoramic history of modern art in the entire region—a

view of the trees as perceived through the forest. She was obsessed with the relationships between the artist and society, with the use of art as an ideological weapon, with the terms "commitment," "dependency" and "identity."

I have a few quibbles. Traba, for example, unwisely excluded Chicano and other north-of-the-border Hispanic artists from her analysis. And she was too traditional in her definition of art, almost completely ignoring the rich traditions of Latin American cartooning, photography and other forms of visual art, often more interactive in Latin America than conventional painting.

Nevertheless, in spite of these shortcomings, Traba's provocative, encyclopedic book is a true gift—a tribute to its author's incisive, antagonistic mind. Now that Latin American art is turning all the more commercial, and at a time when individual figures are perceived in a vacuum, her work shows that there is really only one single artwork from Latin America: a collective mirror. ◀

Ilan Stavans, a novelist and critic, teaches at Amherst College. His latest book is *The Hispanic Condition* (HarperCollins).

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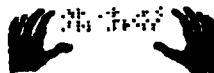


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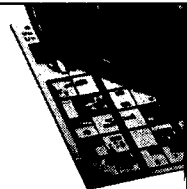
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Continued from page 40

Like many Midwestern cities, Aurora was facing a bleak future. With stores and factories abandoning the downtown area and its tax base eroding, the city desperately needed new development. And there is no denying that some real development has occurred. Today, bridges are being rebuilt and roads reconstructed.

But gambling revenues will never be a substitute for a stable tax base. Like Cabbage Patch Kids, Smurfs and the Rubik's Cube, riverboat gambling promises to be a fad, and the trick is for communities that host the facilities to turn their casinos' short-term profits into long-term investments. The government's take of gambling proceeds derived from riverboats may be useful—but only if they are understood as a shot in the arm as opposed to an iron lung.

The Taxpayers Federation of Illinois, a lobbying group, issued a report in December showing that the state derives just 5 percent of its total rev-

enues from gambling, which includes income from the state lottery, horse racing and riverboats. In fact, those newly licensed riverboats have done little to increase state revenues. As the federation points out, even before the first floating casino took to the waters the state was already collecting the same 5 percent of its revenues from legalized gambling.

And what will happen in the long term when the threshold of saturation is crossed? Most likely, private investors will pull out and count their money, leaving cities with a lot of nice, closed businesses and baroque hulks collecting barnacles in the river.

My city has been lucky so far, but its luck could run out at any moment. Ultimately, gambling has the potential to destroy a town in the same way that it destroys people—enticing the unwary with the promise of enormous riches, but leaving them destitute when the game is finally over.

See, *nobody* jumps off the boat. ◀
Brian Feltes is a writer living in Aurora, Ill.



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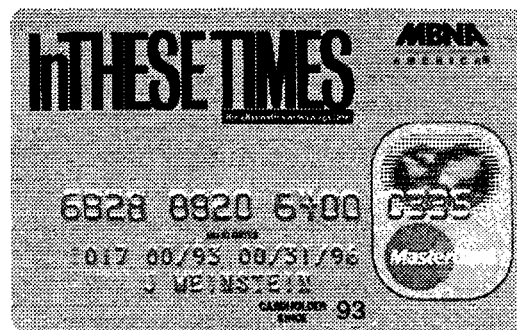
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I N T H E E N D

Sail away

By Brian Feltes

I walked into a sandwich shop in downtown Aurora the other day only to notice, as I walked up to place my order, that the man sitting at the counter poking at a basket of cheese fries was wringing wet. Before I could ask if he needed assistance, the door of the shop burst open and a squad of men in dark suits and sunglasses accosted the man and dragged him kicking and screaming from the establishment.

"Nobody jumps off the boat," they explained.

The man, as it turned out, had just jumped from the deck of the Hollywood Casino, a riverboat that plies the Fox River in Aurora, a former factory town about 40 miles west of Chicago. While more than a few patrons have been soaked at the Hollywood since it set sail two years ago, the city itself has flourished thanks to the gambling revenues generated by the boat. Seedy taverns and pornography shops have been replaced with trendy cafes and upscale art galleries. People are driving expensive cars, the Fox Valley Mall has an Abercrombie and Fitch, and both Frank Sinatra and Liza Minelli have recently performed at the local Paramount Arts Center.

True, the sky above Aurora is now lit up at night like a full-blown invasion from outer space, but most will tell you that the Hollywood is worth it—that the boat has been good for the community, that it has created jobs and investment opportunities.

Which, of course, is at least partly true. During the last three months of 1994, the seven gambling boats licensed by the state of Illinois raked in

\$164.3 million. And that is why many other Illinois cities—Chicago foremost among them—are dying to make themselves prospective "gaming sites."

Behind the lure of quick riches, however, lies an ominous reality: what legislators and gaming industry experts awkwardly refer to as the "threshold of saturation"—the point at which the number of gambling outlets will outstrip the number of available gamblers. The first signs of saturation are already being spotted in Aurora. The Hollywood has suffered a 6 percent decline in revenues since the Grand Victoria casino opened last fall in Elgin, another post-industrial city located just 20 miles up the Fox River.

But the great fear hanging over Aurora is that Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley will finally realize his dream of turning the Windy City into the gambling mecca of the Midwest—a move that would almost certainly scuttle suburban boat operations and imperil Aurora's newfound prosperity. And that is why even in Aurora there has been resistance to the casino movement—many citizens resent their elected officials throwing dice with the future of their community.

Still, for Aurora, the gamble may pay off. When Illinois legalized riverboat gambling in the early '90s, Aurora Mayor David Pierce moved quickly to ensure that our city would be first in the Chicago area to cash in on the craze.

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